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THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

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THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

A SUMMARY OF THE
INSTRUCTIONS ON THE VIRTUES AND ON PRAYER

GIVEN BY

Saint Jane Frances Frémyot de Chantal

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De

Compiled by
THE SISTERS OF THE VISITATION
Harrow-on-the-Hill

With a Preface by
HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL BOURNE
Archbishop of Westminster

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EXHORTATIONS. CONFERENCES. INSTRUCTIONS AND RETREAT

BY

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SELECTED LETTERS OF
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THE SPIRIT OF SAINT JANE FRANCES DE CHANTAL

AS SHOWN BY HER LETTERS

Translated by the Sisters of the Visitation, Harrow-on-the-Hill,
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PREFACE

The words of one who has lived a long life in constantly growing intimacy with God must have a great value for those who, even far behind and with lagging steps, are striving to walk in the same path. And when those words are really the lessons learnt from another great Saint, deeply pondered and carried into daily practice, they have a worth of more than two-fold greatness. In this book on the " Spiritual Life " we have the heavenly wisdom of St. Francis de Sales, meditated upon and fully assimilated by St. Jane Frances de Chantal, and embodying the supernatural sweetness and strength which—perhaps, in inverse order—were the characteristics of both those great Servants of God.

At the present day the second part of the book, namely, the *Instructions on Prayer,* will have the wider usefulness. There is a marked increase in the number of those who, within and without the unity of the Catholic Church, desire to know more about the ways of approach to God by prayer. They have an earnest wish to draw closer to Him. The first Mother of the Visitation had been taught these things by St. Francis. She had acquired for herself a deep experimental knowledge of them. Thus she became a sure and trustworthy guide to other souls in her own Order and beyond it, for her own generation and for all who in the future may listen to her instruction. Her guidance is strengthening and consoling. There can be

no union with God without the renunciation of self whenever and wherever self blocks the way. We must generously persevere even when there is no sensible taste or touch of spiritual things. Our imagination may be assailed by thoughts that pursue and assail, and seem to possess us, against our will. In spite of all we must go on. These are some of the lessons which the Saint by precept and practice will lead us to understand and to carry out in our own spiritual journey. And they will bring us in all probability, if we strive to be faithful, to that very simple way of prayer which is usually the portion of those who, in the midst of much preoccupation and many distractions, nevertheless endeavour generously to do all things in union with their Divine Master. May the number of such souls grow rapidly as they read this book.

FRANCIS CARDINAL BOURNE.
Archbishop of Westminster.

Quinquagesima Sunday, 1928.

COMPILERS' PREFACE

Upon the suggestion and with the kind help of the Right Reverend Abbot Butler, O.S.B., we have compiled this summary of the instructions of St. Jane Frances de Chantal on the virtues and on prayer.

Our first intention had been to give reference from the writings of St. Francis de Sales wherever his teaching coincided with that of St. Chantal, but we soon gave up the task, finding that, throughout, the instructions of both Saints were literally synonymous. St. Jane Frances is, in one sense, his true echo, and yet, unlike the fainter reiteration of an echo, in that she reproduces in her own virile style, crystallising truths he elaborates (though he can be a master of epigram) giving them to her hearers with a vigour of language that could not fail to evoke effort, and a simple earnestness that carries conviction. We have, therefore, with a few exceptions, omitted all references to, and quotations from, the writings of the Holy Bishop of Geneva.

A great number of these instructions were given in familiar conversations during the hours of recreation when the Sisters seem to have made full use of the liberty their Mother so well knew how to encourage. They asked her questions on the best methods of acquiring virtues or of contending with their own individual difficulties with a delightful frankness, and apparently, quite regardless of the manifestation of

their personal weaknesses to the ears of their companions. Because of this holy freedom on their part we find the Saint, with willing compliance, passing from one point of vantage for acquiring a virtue to another, to satisfy the enquiries of each. Hence the question arises whether it were better to summarise the whole as we find it in her Conferences and letters or to disentangle the matter and put it under special headings. We have taken a middle course and hope in this way not to lose the unique character of the Mother's familiar talks with her children, while keeping the instructions on the same virtues grouped, in as far as it can be done without taking from the discoursive nature of these unconventional family gatherings.

The translations into English of St. Chantal's writings are all, unfortunately, out of print, with the exception of two volumes of her letters published respectively by Messrs. Burns Oates, Washbourne and Co., 1917, and by Messrs. Longmans, Green and Co. 1922.

There is a recent reprint of the American translation of the Life of St. Chantal by Mgr. Bougaud, translated by the Visitation of Georgetown, C.D., U.S.A., which Monastery has done so much good work for the Order.

In all references *Oeuvres* signifies the works of St. Chantal. The references to St. Francis are put under the title *Oeuvres de St. François de Sales.*

Part I

THE VIRTUES

INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER

A few words on the life and virtue of St. Jane Frances Frémyot de Chantal whose instructions we summarise in the following pages will not fail, we hope, to interest the reader.

As star differeth from star in glory so do the Saints of God. And those most helpful to us, weary strugglers in the race, are the men and women who with patient long-drawn courage, toiled to bring out the image of the Creator in themselves and others. Their life-story teaches us how to face the daily conflict with our fallen nature. We see them now falling back in their efforts and again regaining ground, until, with time and the grace of God, what was heretofore rigid became plastic, what was hard gentle, what was brusque gracious, what was begun with a desire to subdue nature by severe bodily austerity not infrequently gave place to the no less strenuous exercise of Christian meekness and forbearance with self and with others. What was passionate in human affection became tempered till, restrained and calmed, it yielded wholly to divine love and no longer found satisfaction in anything less than God. To this category belonged Jane Frances de Chantal.

As a child, brusque, downright, insistent, grown to adolescence she risked and lost, for a period, the approval of her family, by firmly rejecting what was looked upon as a most desirable alliance, because she

saw in her suitor's character what others at the time failed to discover.[1]

It might fairly have been predicted of her that were she in after life to emulate the Saints it would be by asceticism in its severest aspect; whereas we shall find her as the years go by, like her great exemplar St. Francis, pre-eminently distinguished in all spiritual guidance of herself or of others for moderation and common sense.

Heredity was strong in her, she gloried in the loss of life and property endured by her ancestors for defence of the faith. Even her devotions were characteristic of her spirit. Her Saints of predeliction were those who had suffered by martydom or by their writings or labours in defence of the Church during the first centuries. So much did she love them that it became a proverb among her spiritual Daughters in later years. When such feasts came round they would say: "To-morrow is the feast of one of our Mother's saints."[2]

In those young days, and indeed all her life, to see a church or a monastery desecrated or burnt down was a sensible pain to her.

Between the ages of twenty and twenty-one Jane Frémyot married the Baron de Chantal who was a few years older than she. It was an ideally happy union which fully satisfied the affection of both hearts.

During her husband's enforced absences at court or in the wars with his regiment (for those were days of incessant internecine warfare) Madame de Chantal never entertained at Bourbilly.[3] But upon his return the château became the rendezvous of all the *noblesse* of the neighbourhood.

In her household she was equally feared and loved;

[1] This gentleman was a heretic but posed as a convert to Catholicity to gain the girl's affections—de Chaugy, *Mémoires*, *1re partie*, ch. iii.
[2] *Ibid.*, *Mémoires*, *3me partie*, ch. 1, p. 344 *sq.*
[3] The residence of the newly married couple.

severe in expelling vice but very merciful to faults that were not of malice. So admirably did she govern as fully to justify those words of St. Francis de Sales written after he had become acquainted with her : " I cannot speak but with respect of this most holy soul. She combines profound humility with a very broad and capable mind. She is simple and sincere as a child, of a lofty and solid judgment. A great soul with a courage for holy undertakings beyond her sex. Indeed I never read the description of the valiant woman of Solomon without thinking of Madame de Chantal."

After eight years of married life God put an end to our Saint's earthly happiness. Monsieur de Chantal was accidentally wounded by the discharge of a friend's gun while out shooting. The news was brought to his wife, who at this time was confined to her bed, owing to the recent birth of her fourth child. She rose at once and went to the scene of the accident. When she heard from her husband's lips that the wound was mortal her grief was inconsolable, and when he besought her to accept the will of God his words were more than she could bear ; she left his presence to pour out her anguish in supplication to God. " Lord," she said, " take all I have in the world—parent, property, children, take all, only leave me this beloved husband whom Thou Thyself hast given me." M. de Chantal lingered for a week and then died. It was in the Spring of 1602. From henceforth Jane Frances was crucified to the world and the world to her. She made a vow of chastity, no longer frequented society, considerably diminished her retinue of servants and drew up for herself a strict rule of life with no other guide than the good God. The hours she was in the habit of spending in hunting and similar amusements she now devoted to prayer, reading and good works.

Living in the country far from such spiritual helps

as a city usually provides, she keenly felt the need of a holy and capable director. Of her prayer for this end she later wrote, at the entreaty of one of her spiritual Daughters : " I spoke to God as if I had seen Him with my own eyes, so certain was I that I should be heard. I laid before Him His faithfulness in as much as He pledged His word that He would not give a stone to one who asked for bread, that He would open to those who knocked at the door of His mercy." She asked for a Saint to direct her and promised to give him implicit obedience. God heard and answered her prayer, but not at once.

During those early days of her widowhood she was vouchsafed many supernatural favours in which God manifested to her her future guide, somewhat of her future vocation and made known to her that He would prove her by many trials inward and from without.

Her stay at Bourbilly was of short duration for in December, 1602 she received a letter from the old Baron de Chantal, her father-in-law, to the effect that if she did not come and live with him he would remarry and disinherit her children. She obeyed his summons and spent seven and a half years at Montholon, his residence.

The divine warning she had received was not long in fulfilment but it found her prepared for the suffering that was to prove her. M. de Chantal was seventy-five years old and completely in the hands of an ignorant, overbearing woman who acted as his housekeeper. At once this woman handed over her five children to Madame de Chantal to be cared for, taught and occasionally dressed by her, and in every way treated on a level with her own children. Without a murmur she accepted the novel situation. This servant often roused her master's anger against his daughter-in-law

and occasionally treated her with insult.[1] We will not here enter into the unhappy choice our Saint made of a spiritual director, or rather of the manner in which she allowed herself to be persuaded at a moment of sore perplexity, to seek counsel from a Minim Father who wholly lacked the gift of guidance for souls such as hers. This priest so shackled her spirit, so tied her down and burdened her with penances, prayers and harsh restrictions, that she felt a disgust and repugnance in following his direction, yet she obeyed him with absolute submission.

For two years she bore this terrible yoke and was then released by St. Francis de Sales whom she met for the first time in the Spring of 1604.

The Visitation was founded in 1610.

These six years of intimate spiritual guidance by the Holy Bishop of Geneva fitted Jane Frances to undertake the arduous work of foundress of the new Order.[2] And they were followed by yet another six years during which the organisation of the newly-founded Institute was shared by both Saints, the capacities of each complementing the other. In this way, under God, it came about that, as their great undertaking grew, the bond of spiritual intimacy between two souls of such unparalleled candour and simplicity naturally grew and strengthened. Few can read the correspondence during these years without

[1] Mother de Chaugy tells us: "Our Blessed Mother was, as our holy Founder used to say, 'by nature, of a domineering disposition.' Hence we can draw a fair estimate of the virtue she practised while at Montholon." *Mémoires, 3me partie*, ch. xvii., p. 448.

[2] It was during these years that St. Francis wrote the following to Madame de Chantal: "You must make up your mind to suffer temptations nearly all your life, never consent to them nor be astonished at them, for *what does he know who is not tempted?*"—de Chaugy, *Mémoires, 3me partie*, ch. xxvii, p. 517. And to one of her Daughters on the eve of her last journey from Annecy, St. Jane said: "My child, for forty-one years temptations have pursued me and must I for that lose courage? No, though He slay me yet will I trust in Him." So were the words of St. Francis verified.—*Ibid.*

feeling that they are being drawn up into a higher sphere. Nor can they lay down these incomparable letters without being conscious that these two human beings formed a friendship with the sole desire of bringing out in themselves and in each other the image of their Creator. The sense of reverence, the grace of light which comes of the perusal of these pages, is not a light that dies away ; it reveals a great truth, it leaves a lasting conviction of the utter transitoriness of this world's joys and of the wisdom of those who relinquish them.

The inevitable outcome of this spiritual intercommunion of two such spirits in their quest for God reached its summit after twelve years of friendship—a friendship of which St. Francis had written to St. Jane in 1605, " It is whiter than the snow, purer than the sun ; this is why I have loosened its reins . . . letting it take its own course."[1]

And now the holy Bishop felt the time had come to make the supreme sacrifice to God. St. Jane was in Retreat and St. Francis had fallen seriously ill. Having heard that his life was in danger, she writes to ask permission to prolong her solitude, as it had been broken into by the news of his state of health which had caused her sorrow and distraction. He grants the desired permission and presses on her the necessity of more complete denudation of self, suggesting that she should make some such ejaculatory prayers as the following : " Pluck, O Lord, from my heart all that clothes it, take all freely, make no exception. Tear me from myself. O self, I quit you for ever." He will

[1] *Oeuvres complètes de Saint François de Sales.* Edition d'Annecy, t. xiii, p. 84. All quotations from the Saint in the following pages will be taken from this edition which is being published under the supervision of the Sisters of the Visitation of Annecy and has already reached its twenty-first volume. Tome i was published in 1892, and Tome xxi in 1923. Imprimerie J. Abry. Annecy. Emmanuel Vitte, Lyon et Paris.

have her indifferent as to who may serve for the nourishment of her soul, he or another. Otherwise, he tells her, she will be receiving help according to her own liking and will not therefore be quitting self. The Bishop concludes the letter by asking her to tell him if she finds this lesson profitable.[1] St. Jane Frances understood at once the full import of this letter ; it was a call for the final stripping of her heart of all things human and it found her ready. For had she not been making her way " with both feet " all these years up the rugged mount of Calvary ? She replies without delay or hesitation : This dear letter, my unique Father, has indeed done me good. Blessed be He who inspired you to write it. Blessed be the heart of my Father for ever and ever.

I have a great desire and, I bethink me, a firm resolve with the help of God's grace to abide in this state of denudation. I feel that my spirit is emancipated and with, I cannot say what infinite depth of consolation, at seeing myself thus in the very hands of God. For the rest of me [nature's part] truly I keep wondering at myself. Still, I do what you tell me and have no doubt but that, God aiding, I will continue to advance.

I must tell you that my heart, if I let it, would go on seeking to reclothe itself, but I in no way permit it, so that these overtures can only show themselves from afar ; for, methinks, I ought no longer to reflect on, or desire, or aspire to anything that Our Lord would not have me think, love or desire, that I may be ruled by the superior part. As to the inferior, I am faithful in not taking any notice of it. . . .

May Jesus make you a great Saint and I believe He will . . . Good bye, My true Father. This evening I will send you the news.[2]

[1] *Oeuvres de St. F. de Sales. Lettre à la Mère de Chantal*, t. xvii, p. 214.
[2] *Oeuvres. Lettre à St. François de Sales*, t. iv. vol. i, p. 112-3.

Upon receiving the above, the Bishop tells her of the incomparable consolation it has given him, and she, in reply, puts this one word which reveals so much.

" My Father, the razor has cut deep. . . . I thank God for the graces and consolations your soul has received in knowing me to be in a state of utter denudation before God. Oh ! May Jesus continue to give you this consolation and me this happiness. I am full of hope, courage, peace and tranquillity. . . . Thanks be to God I do not feel urged to think over that of which I have divested myself. I continue [in my state of denudation] unquestioning. I see it as a thing afar, but it does not cease to affect me and then I straightway divert my mind from it. May He be blessed who has brought it about. May His goodness confirm me and make me strong in the execution of it, when it will be His will. . . . I recall the day on which you bade me relinquish all and I replied : ' I do not know what more I have to renounce,' and you said : ' Have I not told you, my Daughter, that I will strip you of every thing ? ' O God ! It is easy to quit what is around us, but to quit one's skin, flesh, bones, and penetrate into the very marrow which it seems to me is what we have done, this is a thing, great, difficult, impossible, were it not for the grace of God. The sole glory then is due to Him. May it be His for ever ! " [1]

The Bishop answers : " All goes well, my very dear Mother. Yes, you must remain in this holy denudation until God reclothes you. *Remain there*, Our Saviour said to His Apostles, till you be reclothed in virtue from above. Your solitude will not be interrupted until after Mass to-morrow. Your imagination, my Mother, is representing to you that you have not quitted the care of your self nor your affec-

[1] *Oeuvres*, t. iv, vol. i, pp. 115, 116.

tion to spiritual things. It is wrong in this, for have you not quitted all and forgotten all? Tell God this evening that you renounce all the virtues, wishing to have them only in so far as He wills to give them to you, and that you have no desire to acquire them except in the measure that He will make use of them for His good pleasure. . . .

"Our Lord loves you, my Mother, He wishes you to be wholly His, no longer to have any other arms to bear you than His, nor any other bosom on which to repose than His and His providence. Stretch not your view otherwhere and let not your spirit find repose save only in Him. Keep your will so simply united to His will that nothing can come between the two. Think no longer of the friendship, nor of the union which God has made between us; nor of your children, nor of your own heart, nor of your soul; nor of anything whatsoever, for you have surrendered all to God. Reclothe yourself with your crucified Saviour, love Him in His sufferings and make ejaculatory prayers thereon. . . . Whatever you have to do, do it no more because it is according to your own inclination but purely because it is the will of God. . . . I feel insensibly in the depths of my heart new confidence to serve God better in holiness and justice all the days of my life, and I find myself denuded, thanks to Him who died naked so that we might understand how to live despoiled of everything. . . . Live peacefully in all happiness, my Mother, reclothed in Jesus Christ our Lord.

"Francis, Bishop of Geneva."[1]

Up to this St. Jane had sought the Bishop's guidance both, as we have seen, for her own spiritual needs and for the thousand and one difficulties entailed in a

[1] *Oeuvres de S. F. de Sales*, t. xvii, p. 218.

great undertaking like the foundation of a new Religious Order. The first urgent years of its establishment were, however, now successfully past and the claims of his diocese became daily more engrossing. Frequent journeys necessitated by his pastoral duties, his spiritual writings, the overwhelming demands upon his time from rich and poor, who equally sought his advice in and out of the confessional ; all combined to leave him less and less leisure as the years succeeded one another to correspond with or to visit the Mother and her spiritual family. And now her manner of grasping without delay or hesitation the full meaning of his letter, her quiet, simple, unflinching acceptation of all she saw God was asking of her, brought home to him the work grace had wrought in her soul, her attainment to a degree of perfection which possibly even he did not until then realise. Henceforth her letters about the affairs of the Order were, indeed, fully answered, though with unavoidable delay, and, at times, when she would put a question regarding her own spiritual difficulties, it would go unanswered, perhaps of set purpose or perchance because the pressure of more urgent matters supplanted it in his memory.

Now and again during those succeeding years we find, in such of her letters as have been preserved to us, a passing allusion to his silence on the interest of her soul such as this : " You have no news, say you, to send me. Eh ! Can you draw no words from your heart for me ? It is a long time since I have had any. Good Jesus ! What a consolation it will be to speak some day heart to heart. May the divine Saviour grant me this grace, and in the mean time, may He make you purely and simply entirely His own."[1]

But no word of complaint (unless the above could

[1] *Oeuvres*, t. iv, p. 569.

be considered such) can we find recorded by her pen. Yet while bearing the consequences of her heroic acceptation we sometimes come across a plea for her Sisters. In a postscript to a letter dated March 3rd, 1620, she writes: "Remember, please, to answer what our little superior of Bourges asks you about that Sister. You ought, I assure you, to communicate sometimes with those poor superiors who are so far away from us. Alas! they excite my pity. Write to them two or three times a year. I know, indeed, that you are full of love and charity for these dear souls who belong to us and that it is only leisure that you need. But I am quite sure that you will not be displeased with me if I beg of you to make an effort to do this. You are so absolutely the best of Fathers that a little line dilates and consoles their hearts beyond words. Nature holds to that and how can nature be altogether killed?" [1]

So time passed until an opportunity came in 1622 for the much longed-for personal meeting. It was three and a half years since our Saint had met the Bishop. During that time she had kept notes both of the state of her conscience and of the affairs of the Institute. They met in the convent parlour at Lyons, and St. Jane Frances was about to open her personal notes when St. Francis waved them aside saying: "We will treat of these matters, Mother, when we meet at Annecy: let us now confer about the affairs of the Order." The conversation lasted four hours, at the end of which she left to visit, at his request, some other houses of the Visitation—her personal notes still unopened in her hand. This was their last meeting. In a few days St. Francis died.[2]

The sad news reached St. Jane at the Convent of

[1] *Oeuvres*, t. iv, p. 382.
[2] *Cf* de Chaugy, *Mémoires, 2me partie*, ch. xiv, p. 211.

Bourges, the last of those he had desired her to visit. She returned to Annecy in time to receive the remains of the holy Bishop.

For three months the coffin was placed in the sanctuary close to the Sisters' choir grille, awaiting a fitting mausoleum. During all that time whenever St. Jane could free herself from her monastic duties she remained in prayer at the feet of the Holy Founder. Mindful of his words to her at Lyons that when they met at Annecy she should render him an account of her conscience, and wishing now, in death, in all things to obey him as she had done in life, she chose a day and a time when she could be quite alone with his mortal remains. Kneeling beside the coffin she relieved herself of the long pent up history of her struggles, victories, failures, graces, crosses; just as she had done of old in those early days when, in unchecked confidence, she revealed the profound and hidden depths of her beautiful soul, so now she made all known to him with the intense candour of her character and received the comfort he no longer denied her. For though her mortal ears could not hear his voice, her spiritual understanding recognised it clearly within her. He had already bequeathed to her the exclusive care of his beloved Institute. But from this wonderful interview, this colloquy betwixt the living and the dead, she went forth with new strength to take up her task and, considering the height of the standard demanded of human nature, she accomplished it, though amid many trials yet with phenomenal success.

Towards the end of this year, 1623, Monseigneur de Genève (Jean François de Sales) upon examining the papers of his holy brother found among them a great number of letters from St. Jane Frances to her saintly director. Instinctively, he felt that they

would contain all the most intimate sentiments of her soul, and from a sense of chivalry, without, alas! any restriction, which he might so legitimately have enforced as her bishop, he sent her the whole consignment. Even we, who, comparatively, know so little of her character feel it hardly necessary to say that, notwithstanding the entreaties of her Daughters she burnt every letter.

M. Michael Favre, confessor, almoner and confidential secretary of St. Francis and likewise confessor of the Annecy community, assured the Sisters that the Bishop had put aside all St. Jane's letters, docketed them, written his own reflections as to their contents along the margins of very many of them and marked many passages, intending, when he should be relieved of his episcopal duties, to which he was looking forward, to write a memoir of the inner life of this chosen soul. The quixotic chivalry of Mgr. de Genève deprived the Order and the Church of this treasure ; or, could it have been in the designs of God to permit so lamentable an occurrence in order to teach a still higher lesson through this act of self-annihilation and humility than could have been learnt even from the intimate revelations of the soul of one of God's greatest servants ?

Be that as it may, her words, as the flames mounted up, manifest that she had not consigned these letters to the fire without being aware that they contained St. Francis's thoughts upon her own written words ; for a Sister who was present tells us, as they burnt, St. Jane could not refrain from saying : " Ah, what beautiful things are burning."

Dépositions de la Sœur Françoise Angelique de la Croix de Fésigny. Procès de canonisation[1].

[1] de Chaugy, *Mémoires*, p. 220.

The above period of our Saint's life was not, however, all suffering, for Mother de Châtel had it from her own lips that from the years 1615 to 1619, (those be it noted, immediately before and after St. Francis wrote her the above letters) at her daily communion she felt an inward heat about her heart so great that she could scarcely bear it and it seemed to her that this fire within burned out and consumed at each communion something of her inward imperfections and that this gave her a great sense of tranquillity and sweetness.

Mother de Chaugy also gives us an account of an ecstasy of love vouchsafed to this blessed Mother in 1632, and as this seems a fitting place to relate it, we do so with love and with reverence.[1]

On St. Basil's day she sustained a great assault of divine love which prevented her from being able to speak to the Sisters at recreation. Her eyes closed, her countenance aglow, she turned to her spinning-wheel and made an effort to rouse herself by spinning, but the half-threaded distaff remained motionless in her hand. Finding the heavenly favour overmastering her she asked the Sisters to sing a canticle which Mother de Brechard had once composed for her, and tried to sing it with them. This seemed to help her somewhat to come to herself. Then to hide the grace she had received she exerted herself to speak. Her words were of fire and are as follows : as she uttered them they were carefully taken down : [2]

" My dear Daughters, St. Basil and the greater number of our holy Fathers and pillars of the Church were not martyred. Why was this, do you think ?" When each one had given her thought : " And I," said this blessed Mother, " I believe that it is because

[1] *Ibid., Mémoires,* pp. 355-356.
[2] No doubt by Mother de Chaugy herself

there is a martyrdom which is called the martyrdom of love, in which God preserves the life of His servants so that they may work for His glory. He makes them at the same time both martyrs and confessors ; I know," she added, " that is the martyrdom for which the Daughters of the Visitation are destined, and which God will make those endure who are so happy as to desire it." A Sister asked her how this martyrdom came about. " Give," she replied, " your full consent to God and you will feel it. It is this," she continued, " Divine love thrust its sword into the most hidden and deepest depths of our soul, severing ourselves from ourselves. I know a soul in which this love has driven asunder things that she has felt more acutely than if the sword of the tyrant had separated her soul from her body." Mother de Chaugy interrupts her narrative here to say : " We know that she was speaking of herself." " How long," a Sister asked her, " does this martyrdom last ? " " From the moment," she replied, " that we give ourselves with no reserves to God until the moment of our death. But this only applies to generous hearts who are constant and loyal to their offering. God does not give this martyrdom to feeble hearts—hearts that have in nowise over-much love and steadfastness, these He lets take their own little way lest He might lose them altogether, for He will never violate free will." Again she is asked if this martyrdom of love could ever equal the martyrdom of the body. " Do not," she said, " let us make comparisons, although I think the one is in no way inferior to the other, for *love is strong as death* and the martyr of love suffers incomparably more in retaining his life because it is the will of God than in giving it in testimony of his faith, love and fidelity."

The last eight or nine years of her life St. Jane

Frances's sufferings and temptations exceeded those of any previous period and as they were more subtle, spiritual, partook more of the divine, so was her agony the greater.[1]

It was the God-given preparation for the severance, the breaking up of the union between flesh and spirit, verifying her own words that like the martyrdom of the body, that of love has too its rack, its fiery ordeal, its passion, before the final freedom of the immortal soul.

When the following instructions were being given and our Saint was in the making, Cardinal de Berulle, coming one day from a conversation with her, said : " I have just been speaking with one of God's greatest lovers on earth."[2]

[1] *Cf* de Chaugy *Mémoires*, 3*me partie*, ch. xxvii, p. 518.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 355.

CHAPTER II

CHARITY

Words of St. Francis de Sales to the Sisters of the First Monastery of the Visitation of Paris :

" For what end do you think has God put you into this world, my Daughters, and above all why has He called you into holy religion if not to be victims of holocaust, consumed each day in His holy love throughout the whole length of your lives, Sacrifices of oblation to the Divine Majesty ?

" It is this that imposes upon you the obligation of annihilating in yourselves, to the utmost of your power, every hindrance to perfection, to union with God.

" Above all must be crushed self-love, self-will, the desire of honour, the satisfaction of the senses. You must live by dying and die in living. Nor must anything that is in you be made use of for any other end than the service and glory of God ; for He has chosen you, individually, to be entirely dedicated and consecrated to Him. And to enable you to live this life He, in His Mercy has given you the Holy Spirit, who, if you are in the state of grace, dwells within you." (*Oeuvres de S. François de Sales.* t. xvi, Appendice C, p. 453.)

This chapter deals chiefly with the aspect of Charity in regard to our neighbour. The Saint's teaching on the first

and highest meaning of the virtue of Charity, the love of God, will be found in her instructions on Prayer.

In the opening chapter of the *Answers*, St. Jane Frances says :

I will not refuse, my dearest Sisters, to answer the questions you put to me about our Rules and Constitutions. Would that it had pleased our good God to have permitted that our Blessed Father himself were here to respond to your desire for he would have done so with complete perspicacity and satisfaction to our souls. In default of this we will answer simply as he has taught us and as Our Lord will be pleased to enlighten us. (*Rêponses, ch.* i.) She continues : St. Augustine begins his Rule by recommending the great commandment of God. In the first place he says : " Let God be loved above all things and after Him your neighbour." This commandment then must needs be the foundation and basis of our perfection, for in its observance lies the very sum of all christian and religious perfection. Our first and greatest obligation, in or out of religion, is to keep the divine commandments and those of Holy Church, and in keeping them all else will become easy to us.

That we may more perfectly obey this law of love we must have God alone for the end of all our actions. God grant I may be deceived, but it seems to me, dear Sisters, that we do not reflect enough on the imperative obligations of this commandment. This law of love is, our Blessed Father taught us, the character and mark of the true daughter of the Visitation. Our hearts, thoughts, powers, intelligence, souls should be applied to no other pursuit than that of loving God, and yet, so great is our frailty, I bethink me, we make choice of our trivial inclinations, our own petty wills, our little fancies, rather than, in singleness of heart,

giving all our love to God and to righteousness. As to the love of our neighbour the measure that this divine Master has given us is to love Him truly as ourselves. This rule is most just.

The Saint then enters into detail on the faults against this divine precept. Sometimes, she says, we find in communities weak and quarrelsome spirits who will drop a word of disunion or who will touch the reputation and good esteem of Sisters and produce such bad effects in the heart of the listener that the impression is never lost. They will say, for example, such a one is a good Sister but she lacks the spirit of government; if later she is placed in charge, although she may have good talents to serve usefully for the glory of God, a certain impression remains which may hinder the fruits of her government. Anon, they will say, quietly: It seems to me that such a sister has no liking for you, or, she is truly virtuous but a little soft, or, she is no genius, and similar undervaluing words, which, being repeated one to another, wound hearts, chill charity and lessen good repute, all of which does great harm to union and to the religious spirit. I know that this evil crept into a well-reformed Order, and Superiors, on perceiving it, at once made it a reserved case, so as to apply a speedy remedy. Let us then so tenderly love our neighbour, and above all, our Sisters, as not to permit one word ever to escape us that would hurt them. (*Réponses*, ch. i et ii.)

Our Blessed Father said that *Charity seeks not evil and when it sees it, it turns away.* Now we cannot help seeing it, nor must we think what is evil is not evil[1] but when we see it let us go to God and then looking upon ourselves we shall find many faults, many things to correct and censure, for which we must profoundly

[1] Our divine Saviour did not say that those who were crucifying Him were not doing ill, for that was clear; nevertheless He excused them—we must do in like manner. (*Entr.* xii.)

humble ourselves. My Daughter, the cordial love which we should bear our Sisters is not a love of feeling it is a heart-love, not the heart of flesh, but the heart of the will. Let the senses and all that is of nature turn and twist ; our affection or lack of it, our likes or dislikes, matter not at all, so long as our higher nature remains firm and unshaken in this love ; so long as we are as ready to give proofs of it when feeling intense repugnance and aversion as when we are enjoying the delights of sensible affection. Unless this be our manner of acting we shall never do aught of any avail. (*Entr.* x.)

In her next Conference the Saint, pursuing the same subject, continues : Sometimes we offend our neighbour, or rather God in our neighbour, by speaking inadvisably, by not speaking at all. I am told something good of one for whom I have no great affection, it displeases me and I am silent, or I answer coldly and my coldness may take away somewhat of the good opinion in which she is held ; or I lessen it by some little word I drop in an undertone, and this word, falling like a drop of oil on cloth, makes an impression that cannot be effaced in the heart of the sister who has heard it. Now all the evil that I may be the occasion of to this Sister through my comportment will be laid at my door. I shall be guilty of it and receive severe chastisement. God says *He hates six things and the seventh His soul detesteth* (*Prov. vi,* 16) to wit : *to divide hearts and sow discord among brethren.* (*Ibid.*, 19.)

Impressing on her Daughters that love should be the sole stimulus to their fidelity the Mother says :

Imagine, my dear Daughters, that you see the glorious St. Augustine in the midst of you, saying to you as he said to the good souls for whom he wrote his Rule : *God grant that you observe all these things in love as being enamoured of spiritual beauty.*

Were you to do all that it is possible for man to do, it would be profitless, a mere pretence, a sham if done without love. But as the great Saint elsewhere says: "love and do what you will." Whatever you do if done with love it suffices. *Observe therefore all these things* (he says, *all*, for love is careful to omit nothing) *in love as being enamoured of spiritual beauty and giving a good odour of the sweetness of Jesus Christ* : that is to say of the virtue of Jesus Christ. Weigh well these words "as being enamoured of spiritual beauty." Oh, my dear Sisters, if our minds, instead of being taken up with so many useless matters, were occupied with divine things, how many beauties we should discover in the hidden depth of our soul! How supremely delightful would the spiritual life appear to us! How full of fragrance should we find the virtues, words, and actions of our Good Master and Saviour! Ah, my dear Daughters, to me it is pathetic to see the childish things that divert us from this happiness. I bethink me that to acquire it for you in its perfection I would willingly give my life. Remember that saying of St. Teresa to her Daughters : "There is no unhappiness like unto that of a Religious who does not give herself wholly to God ; who would have a little of God, a little of self, a little of the world, a little liberty." No, Sisters, we shall never have peace in this half-and-half course. If you seek not God to the exclusion of all else, you will have nothing but unrest. Let us rid our minds of everything save the one thing necessary. Have no other interest, no other desire than God and His love by the accomplishment of His holy will. These blessed Rules are for us His signified will ; every word therein ought to be written in our hearts and expressed in our actions. Read them attentively and lovingly. Practise them faithfully and God will bless you. (*Exh.* xvii, *sur chap.* xxvi *de la Règle*, p. 106.)

Speaking on the same words of the Rule in her next Chapter, St. Jane says : All is to be observed, but observed with love and charity by an expansion of the heart towards divine love. For the sake of love we keep silence, accept humiliations, rest, rise, pray, say the Office at the appointed times. This sacred love makes us put up with every variety of inconvenience, undertake cheerfully things most abject and painful to nature. It makes us so careful to every observance that we would never willingly omit one tittle thereof. In short this heavenly love must be our motive, our aim ; all must be observed with loving charity because we are enamoured of spiritual beauty. Now you know the nature of our will is such that as soon as it has discovered some fair and lovable object it at once desires to possess and enjoy it. God is surpassingly beautiful, good and perfect, and His goodness leads Him to communicate to souls who serve Him some tiny portion of these virtues which, being in the soul, render it marvellously fair and produce the spiritual beauty that so enamours us that we desire to observe our Rules—and they too are the means by which we arrive at the enjoyment of this beauty more to be desired than all earthly delights.

It is well, sometimes, to consider the beauty of a virtuous and spiritual soul, so that looking upon it, our will may be kindled to love and be thereby encouraged, (*Exh.* xviii, *Ibid.*)

In her Spiritual Retreat the Mother says :

Without holy charity for our neighbours we are without virtue. In this same meditation she would have us compare Our Lord's love for us with our love for our neighbour. Not only did He die for us but He gave us the Blessed Sacrament. He accepted the kiss of Judas who had betrayed Him ; and I am loth to put myself to a little inconvenience, to have my wishes

thwarted, for the sake of my neighbour. His lesson was that we should love one another not only in word but in deed and in truth. Never shall we enter the heavenly Temple but by the sole door of charity, a door that opens on two sides, the love of God and the love of our neighbour. (*Méditation*, xix.)

In one of her letters St. Jane says :

Believe me my Daughter, God will be your guide in all things if you keep yourself humble and lowly in His presence, supporting your neighbour with the utmost gentleness. This is the chief, the great point. (T. iv, vol. i, *lettre* ccxlvi) And in another letter : Aim earnestly at serenity in your own soul, be genial in your words and actions and in your manner of supporting your neighbour and be as good as you can. (T. v, vol. ii, *lettre* dxvi.)

Again : Charity bears all in a spirit of love. Be on your guard against melancholy and fretfulness ; put the best possible interpretation on the actions of your Sisters, look upon them as the consecrated spouses of the Son of God, esteem yourself very little and below them all. (T. v, vol. ii. *lettre* dlxiv.)

To a diffident Mother she writes : You torment your poor mind and want a perfection for yourself and your Daughters that is not to be found in this life. Go on your way in good faith *grosso modo*. Draw from your poverty and that of others the rich treasure of the love of your own abjection. Worry about nothing. In everything, absolutely everything, unite yourself to God. (*Ibid.*, *lettre* ccclxxxvii.)

One more quotation from her letters : Prize the occasions of disapproval of your conduct and actions, hide them in your heart to fondle them tenderly. (*Ibid.*, *lettre* dlxviii.)

St. Jane tells her Daughters how to distinguish between faults of frailty and of malice.

A Sister, she says, does something that is not commendable. Let it be and go to God, meanwhile let us take an honest look into ourselves and maybe we shall find worse things there.

We judge that such a one is not kind and affable when it is we ourselves who are wanting in this virtue, we judge that she has no charity—it is we who fail in it. Were we in the least degree charitable we should excuse her, bear with her, throw a veil over her imperfections. *Judge not and you shall not be judged, condemn not and you shall not be condemned.*[1]

Now I want you to know how to discern between faults of frailty—of inadvertence—which lead to nothing serious, and those which are against charity, and entail evil consequences. A breach of silence from inattention, a few ill-considered words at recreation that hurt nobody, and the like. There is no sin here ; such imperfections are inevitable to our nature and however perfect we are we shall commit them as long as we live. But the faults in which there is serious venial sin are : passing judgment on the actions of others and communicating this thought to others (even if we were not to mention it, there is always sin) complaining, murmuring, speaking of the imperfections of our Sisters and to their disadvantage : disapproving of the government of Superiors and such like. These are dangerous failings ; they lessen the esteem in which our Sisters and our Superiors are held, weaken charity, make a rift in sweet union, and introduce bad habits, so that those who come after us in religion will find it difficult to avoid similar failings. I am not aware of such faults in this house. God grant they may not be ! Defects of this nature are inexcusable, and those who are guilty of them are truly ill-conditioned mischief-makers. Were they committed

[1] Luke vi, 37.

here it would break my heart. I would rather see the plague carrying off the Sisters thick and fast than that such ill-behaviour should exist among us; for dying matters little, provided we are in the grace of God. Again, it is very wrong to repeat to a Sister anything that has been said about her which would give her pain. Were any Sister to do so in this community, unless I knew her to be striving earnestly to overcome this defect, I would rather see her struck dead (provided she were not in mortal sin) than taint the whole monastery.

You say you do not undertsand what is rash judgment. I am very glad you have put this question to me for I have had a great deal of light on this point during the reading of *Philothea* [at table]. Our rash judgments are not as those of seculars ; we have not the same matter, thanks be to God. Our judgments are usually only venial sins, as, for example, we judge a Sister to be dry, unkind, and at once conclude that she dislikes us, when perhaps it is only that she is preoccupied about some business and does not think of answering us ; and the misfortune is that we pass on this opinion to others. In this way we ourselves commit great venial sins and are liable to be the cause of them in those to whom we have spoken.

How careful we should be not to let these imperfections get a footing. One who would commit such would, the opportunity given, commit greater. Immortified, self-opinionated, peculiar and peevish minds are apt to fall into this vice. (*Entr.* xii.)

Elsewhere explaining how strictly we are bound to make restitution for any want of charity, St. Jane tells the Sisters that St. Francis used to say : " Our neighbour is the tree of *knowledge* which we are not permitted to touch." (*Entr.* lxxii.)

A Sister asks: "How are we to behave when thoughts come to us against those whom we see to be more esteemed than ourselves and employed in honourable charges?" The Saint replies: Let not our minds be carried away by silly feelings of envy and jealousy against those who we think are made much of. It is impossible to love unless we esteem; then let us look at the good qualities we see in our Sisters and we shall esteem them with a love that is solid and not liable to change. Our holy Founder always regarded his neighbour as the living image of Jesus Christ; looking away from his imperfections he turned his thoughts to the virtues he saw in him, and if he saw none he looked at the grace of God in his soul. (*Entr.* lxv.)

The question is put: "Must we love a Sister whom we see to be very virtuous more than another who is less virtuous?" We must love our Sisters equally, still we should always love and honour virtue when it is truly found. Our Blessed Father explains this very well in one of his Conferences.[1] But we must not consider which Sisters may possess more or less virtue, for Our Lord has not said: love the most perfect, but He has said: *love one another as I have loved you.*[2] We are all capable of each other's faults, so nothing in another should surprise us. When we fall into imperfections we must make good profit thereof, by loving the abjection that comes of them and by patiently bearing the delay of our perfection, continuing the while with good courage to make the best progress we can. (*Entr.* lxvi).

In a previous talk with the Sisters the Mother said:

It is no small matter, no slight offence against God, to conceal or lessen the good in our neighbour of whom

[1] *Oeuvres de St. F. de Sales*, t. xvi. *Entretiens* xvi. *Des Aversi* [illegible]
[2] John iii, 34.

He has said : *He that toucheth him toucheth the divine Majesty.*[1] If we do not see in a Sister the virtue for which she is praised we must gently and tactfully mention some good we know of her. No one is without some good either of nature or of grace, however poorly gifted. Our neighbour is something so delicate we can hardly touch him without offending God. Indeed I often say that we should have no difficulty in finding matter for absolution in our confessions if we saw more clearly on this point. But because we do not make a careful examination on what concerns this sweet charity towards our neighbour we exonerate ourselves and think we are justified in all we say. Yet our natural inclination, I assure you, ofttimes deceives us. It is a perilous thing and full of danger in religious life ; or we are deluded by the subtilty of our self-love, nay, even by the good opinion we have of ourselves, which makes us think our judgment cannot be at fault. Good actions in themselves, if they are not acts of virtue, will not make us good, for just works do not make us just unless by our manner of doing them. Many a good, just and holy action is neither good, just or holy because of our manner of doing it. (*Entr*, xi.)

Upon being asked if the evil spirit does not sometimes make use of one Sister to tempt another, the Mother replies :

When a Sister gives sugar-plums, speaks words of flattery and praise to another, she is certainly doing the devil's work and causes more harm than she thinks. This was a thing for which our Blessed Father had a great aversion. The Superior of Lyons, a Mother of great virtue and well worthy of love,[2] told him that her daughters praised her. " *What, my Daughter,* he said, *that goes on in this house? It must not be*

[1] He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of my eye.—Za ch, ii. 8
[2] Mother M. A. de Blonay.

allowed; but it is undeniable that where women abound flattery abounds.

Are you, you ask, to let the Superior know the thoughts of esteem that you have about her? No, my Daughter, I would advise you *never* to do so; but tell her freely those you have had to her disadvantage. Whoever may be your Superior, be sincere with her and see God always in her, obeying her with all the perfectoin in your power.

To what degree of perfection, you say, are we called? Look at what your Rule says: *That you are to have but one heart and one soul in God.* We are then called to a surpassing union with God and our neighbour—to a sublime perfection. St. Paul says: *He who loves God and his neighbour has fulfilled the whole law.*[1] Hence springs mutual forbearance. Our Holy Founder tells us that in this sweet support is contained the whole of Christian perfection. He used to say that we must not aspire to a perfection exempt from imperfections, that that is for heaven, but that we must put up with our human nature which will always be liable to commit faults, and for this reason we should always bear with and befriend one another. (*Entr.* xiii.)

Speaking upon another occasion on these same words of the Rule she tells the Sisters that our divine Saviour asked His heavenly Father to give us this union when, before His Passion, He prayed that His Apostles and all those who should believe in Him might be one; and that as His Father was in Him and He in His Father, so we might be united in Him and be made perfect in one. The only happy religious houses are those upon which He pours out this sweet unction. Where disunion prevails unhappiness abounds. But, thank God, we, here, are extremely united; no strife nor bickering is to be seen among us, nor have we

[1] Rom. xiii, 8.

particular friendships. Particular friendships destroy the universal union which ought to subsist between the Sisters, which union is the blessing and precious treasure of communities. (*Réps. chs.* I et II.)

Pursuing this thought of the universality of true religious affection, the Saint continues : We ought to desire the perfection of our Sisters as keenly as our own so that, as the longing for our own grows in the same measure should our longing for theirs increase. In a word, everything in religion should be in common, interior as well as exterior. (*Ibid.*, *ch.* III.)

In a later chapter, speaking again on that affection in common which is the bond of religious union, St. Jane tells the Sisters that she calls their attention once more to this virtue of charity, not that she has remarked any great failing among them on that head, but because it is so often and so strongly recommended in the Constitutions. The Superior is therefore obliged to give quite peculiar attention to see that mutual love and holy friendship reign in the Congregation. Now, sometimes, we think that our affections are pure when in God's sight they are quite otherwise. Love that is really pure looks, tends, aims, solely at pleasing God. I love my Sisters because I see God in them and because it is His wish. My affection, my respect for them is because they represent to me the person of God. This is to have pure love. But if I love a Sister in the hope that she will love me in return or do me some service, my motive is imperfect and unworthy of my vocation. It is an odious thing to love our Sisters for their natural qualities, their wit, or because they and we are of like temperament and similar fancies ; this is what leads to particular friendships and to partialities. The greatest evil that can be in a community is that minds should league together and set up a separate party. It breaks in upon the com-

mon bond of affection, of all-round friendship, in order to form a friendship apart, which means mitigation of observance, overthrow of obedience ; begets endless little jealousies and subverts the true spirit of religion. My Daughters, if your love for your Sisters is not equal, universal and whole-hearted, if it is not established in the bosom of God, it is false, worthless. Beware that you are not misled therein. I assure you I would rather see notable defects in a monastery than this one of special friendships, because of its evil results, and the foolish preoccupation of mind of those who are infected by it. The thousand distractions to which it gives rise hinder that converse with God which ought to be the continual occupation of the soul. On the other hand, when affection is in common, all good, all peace, all tranquillity, are its outcome. By it all perplexity of mind is banished. The purer, the more universal, the more complete this union with our Sisters the greater will be our union with God. (*Exh.* xix.)

After all, as the Rule says : *There is nothing enduring but charity.* (*Réps. ch.* xvi.)

Union with God, bearing with one another and fraternal correction are, St. Jane Frances says, the three means proper for maintaining the spirit of the Visitation.

While speaking on these points a Sister asks her a question concerning zeal. The Saint replies :

I thank you for your question. It is the very thing I thought of recommending to you this morning. She then says, that, for us, zeal consists in the three above points and that our chief zeal should be for ourselves ; otherwise there is danger of forgetting oneself in wishing to perfect others. We ought to labour all our lives in acquiring the virtues proper to our Institute. The vows we have made *of living according*

to our Rule oblige us all to have but *one heart and one soul in God.*

We should ask ourselves : Do we rejoice to see our Sisters virtuous and esteemed ? Would we fain hide their faults from others ? Do we pray for them on seeing them commit them and humble ourselves before God, believing that we ourselves are guilty of greater failings of which we are ignorant, and that if others really knew us they would find it difficult to bear with us ? (*Entr.* xlii.)

Again our Saint would have her Daughters examine :

Is there anything we do to our neighbour that we would not have done to ourselves ? Do we willingly fall in with his wishes ? Do we take to heart his sorrows ? Are we really anxious to console, serve and comfort him ? Ah, my Sisters, as a rule we like to be preferred to him, and yet you see to what this commandment obliges us ; so give it, I implore of you, your careful and serious consideration. Our nearest neighbours are our own dear Sisters with whom we live. Hence do I exhort you to reciprocal and cordial love of one another. (*Réps.*, ch. i et ii.)

In the *Paroles Consolantes*, we find the following :

Give boldly, my Daughters in the name of Our Lord. It is true we should be careful of the goods He gives us, but not in order to be rich or well provided but to enable us to give in charity. And so doing we shall find at the end of the year that our expenditure is none the heavier for it.

The sweet support of our neighbour consists in gently bearing with him in the trying things he does and says, in all that goes against the grain and is distasteful to us, in not wondering at his failings and imperfections and in no wise entertaining any depreciation of him or dryness of heart or repugnance against him, nor reflecting on, nor scrutinising his actions but

bearing in our hearts a tender and loving compassion which will soften us towards him. (*Oeuvres*, t. iii, p. 394.)

Writing to Mother M. A. de Blonay a few months before her death, she says :

If we want to live in peace we must pass over many little things, keeping them between God and ourselves, and never returning the blows aimed at us. (*Oeuvres*, t. viii, vol. 5. *lettre* mdcccxxiv.)

Giving a Chapter at a time of a great plague[1] St. Jane Frances congratulates the Sisters on the fervour of their supplications, their prayers, penances and fasts, undertaken so willingly to appease the divine justice, and she reminds them that one of the ends for which they are gathered together in the cloister is to pray for the people, for the world. She encourages them never to neglect this duty, for they are bound to it by charity. (*Exh.* ii.)

We ought to spare nothing, she says, for our neighbour's good, not even our health if need be, after His example who gave His blood and His life for us. (*Entr.* lxvi.)

She pleads again for her beloved neighbour : I would that we had an ardent desire to ask from God the same graces for all creatures that we ask for ourselves. It is God's intention that we should pray thus: In the Lord's Prayer He has taught us to say *Our Father*. If we had the virtue of charity we should be full of desire for our neighbour and for the conversion of souls for which we ought to have an unbounded zeal. (*Entr.* x.)

" Even as man," says St. Francis, " is the image of God, so the sacred love of man for man is the true image of the heavenly love of man for God." (*Traité de l'amour de Dieu*, l. x, ch. xi.)

[1] From the years 1628 to 1630 inclusive the plague decimated many parts of France and brought untold misery in its train. *Mémoires*, de Chaugy, pp. 250, 251.

Among the *Fragments* we find the following aphorism from the Mother's lips : To dissemble in a matter of injuries heals more evil in an hour than does the desire of revenge in a year. (*Fragments d'Entretiens.*)

In speaking to the novices she says :

We must not look at our Sisters in their nothingness but in their virtues and in the gifts God has placed in them. Regarding them in the heart of God, seeing His image in them and despising ourselves we must keep beneath the feet of all. (*Inst.* v, p. 526.)

And again : By observing others the soul becomes dissipated, busies itself to no purpose and loses the attention it should give to God. Miserable and without virtue, it debases itself, it becomes a slave to curiosity, for minds that are ever occupied about others are perpetually on the lookout to see and know everything. They expose themselves to great danger of yielding to jealousy, of envying the good estate of others, of offending God. If they are not on their guard they will suffer much harm. (*Inst.* x.)

Yet another word of wisdom from the Mother to her novices :

" Let us cultivate the disposition to love, honour and serve our neighbour. We are all frail ; our Sisters stumble now. That is nothing, it is the offspring of this wretched life wherein each in turn commits some fault. My Sister to-day, I to-morrow. (*Ins.* xxii, p. 574.)

St. Jane Frances's charity, so tender and so practical, for the bodily and mental relief of her daughters, cannot be better told than from her own letters. At the time of the terrible plague above mentioned the Mother Foundress visited many of her monasteries but she was forbidden to approach those in the plague zone.

As she passed Allonne where her daughter, Madame de Toulonjon, lived, she spent a few days with her to

settle some business matters. Now Allonne was but a short distance from Autun, where the plague was raging and where there was a house of the Visitation of which Marie Hélène de Chastellux was at the time Superior. We find our Saint writing to this Mother on August 26th, 1628 : " I have been in the wars all day trying to get permission to speak to you at the end of the [enclosure] wall but without success." However, Mother de Chaugy tells us that Mother Marie Hélène succeeded where our Saint had failed, and upon representing to her ecclesiastical Superior that the holy Foundress on her way to Dijon, her next stopping place, would pass within a short half league of Autun, she obtained permission to arrange a meeting in an open field on condition that she kept at a distance while speaking to St. Jane. Madame de Toulonjon drove her mother to the trysting place. Upon seeing her spiritual Daughter standing in the field, immovable, awaiting her, St. Jane Frances invoked the help of God, remained a short time in prayer and making the sign of the cross she said : " Let us meet in the name of God. He is with us and will protect us from harm." She then walked rapidly up to Marie Hélène who did not dare to advance, embraced her affectionately and brought her to her daughter's carriage, making her sit beside her. Gabrielle, Madame de Toulonjon's only child, was with her mother in the carriage. The travelling companion of the Foundress at this time tells us that Madame de Toulonjon said to her : " If I were not in my very soul convinced that my Mother is a Saint I should have almost died of fright." But with this conviction in her heart she did not utter one word of remonstrance. The interview brought comfort to St. Jane and to Mother de Chastellux, and no ill results to any of the occupants of the carriage.[1]

[1] *Cf.* de Chaugy. *Mémoires*, p. 251–2.

Apparently, before the meeting, in a letter dated August 28th, our Saint plans a contrivance, subject to the approval of Mother de Chastellux, by which the community can be supplied with meat. Sheep, are to be purchased and kept up in the hills outside the plague zone, one being slaughtered each week and conveyed to the convent, for the Sisters were very short of food. She also asks for a pattern of the material they are in need of for clothing. Towards the end of this letter she says : Our Sisters of Paris, Blois and Bourges are in the same plight as you, only in much more danger because they cannot avoid intercourse with the outside world, nor can they help sending the out-Sisters into the town to buy the necessary provisions.[1]

Because of this characteristic episode we have chosen the relief of Autun to give some idea of the manner in which the holy Foundress dealt with her stricken community. But we count sixteen such at this time, and there were probably many more, to whom our Saint was sending food, clothing, medicine, of which they were in the direst need. Never once overcome by the magnitude and the urgency of the demands made upon her slender resources, she was one day heard to say : " Oh, how gladly would I sell myself if by so doing I could help our poor Sisters." At this same time her constant letters to these afflicted ones, while reminding them to prepare for the coming of the Spouse, held up their courage and kept alive the heroism which none can fail to recognise who read the account given by Mgr. Bougaud of the Visitation Houses from 1628 to 1631.[2]

[1] *Oeuvres*, t. vi, vol. iii, *lettre* dccclxxx, p. 203.

[2] *St. Chantal and the Foundation of the Visitation* by Monseigneur Bougaud, translated from the eleventh French edition by a Visitandine. Benziger Bros., New York. Burns and Oates, London. Vol. II, ch. vii.

CHAPTER III

THE VOWS

St. Francis de Sales in his preface to the Rule, which constitutes a protective barrier and support to the three vows of Chastity, Poverty and Obedience, tells his Daughters of the Visitation, to fill their souls and nourish their hearts with this holy Rule ; to let the words written therein remain day and night before their eyes that they may meditate on them and in their whole being they should praise God for them. " This Rule," he says, " will be found hard and bitter to nature because it leads to the perfect mortification of self-love." Yet will they " experience in its practice a sweetness more than honey, because to mortify the love of self is an unparalleled consolation to the spirit, for by it the love of Christ lives and reigns in the soul." Therefore would he have them so to study the hidden meaning of each law as thereby to make it relive in their own lives.[1]

This holy Bishop held chastity of the body to be common enough among even unbelievers and amongst persons addicted to other vices. But very few, he maintained, could truly say " my heart is pure."

By this purity of heart he did not mean never to be troubled by sinful desires, for that would be making the virtue of chastity consist in insensibility, but he meant never yielding to unlawful affections.

[1] Préface pour le traité des *Règles de l'Ordre de la Visitation*, t. iv, p. 480, edition 1850. This volume of the new edition is not yet in press.

The fair white adornment of the body which is its honour and, like a lily growing amid thorns, brings forth a wonderful flower whose fruit is honour and riches ; such he deemed the virtue of Purity.[1]

After her husband's death St. Jane Frances made for herself a convent within her heart and constituted the Blessed Mother of God its Lady Abbess. We find St. Francis advising her in his letters how to preserve this inward solitude. " Keep strictly, my Daughter," he writes, " to the cloister of your convent. Do not leave it without the consent of your Lady Abbess and obey her in everything ; she only wishes you to do all that her Son shall tell you."

He tells us that from the time of her husband's death Madame de Chantal's heart became a garden closed by the sacred vow of chastity and surrounded by a thorny hedge of mortification and exercises of virtue.[2]

In answer to questions from her daughters on the Vows, St. Jane Frances says : Yes, my dear Sisters, when we make our vows we bind ourselves to observe Obedience, Chastity and Poverty according to the conditions laid down for us in the Rules and Constitutions. You will see our obligation in the Conferences of our Blessed Father and therein will find light to discern what is sin and what is not sin in regard to the Rules. No Order has rules for the exterior more easy, gentle and light than ours, for there is hardly anything painful to the body ; hence the less excuse for not faithfully keeping them, above all those which perfect the spirit. The Rule says : *He who neglects his way shall die.* Take then my advice ; reflect on these words and be afraid to trangress your Rule. If we weigh well the circumstances marked in

[1] *Spirit of St. Francis de Sales*, by J. P. Camus, Bishop of Belley translated by J. S. Burns and Oates, London, W., 1910. Pp. 142-144.
[2] de Chaugy. *Mémoires, 3me partie*, ch. xvi, p. 444.

this chapter we shall see that it is easier to offend therein than we think. But as the love of God should be the end and object of all our actions, to give Him pleasure by punctual observance ought to be enough for us. A perseverant aim at the perfection of their vocation is an obligation with all Religious. (*Réponses sur la 49me Constitution, p.* 333.)

Section I.

CHASTITY

Speaking of Chastity the Mother says :

The virtue of Chastity is the withdrawal of all our affections, thoughts and desires from created things to occupy them wholly in God, caring to love but Him alone, nor wishful of any love but from Him. (*Exhortation* xx, p. 210.)

And again :

Doubtless it would hinder the angelic purity laid down in our Rules and in the Constitution on Chastity were we to become attached to any earthly thing ; to the pleasure of being loved by creatures, of loving them, of seeing them or occupying ourselves in similar ways for such occupations would be quite unworthy of our vocations. To linger on any idle thoughts would likewise be derogatory to it, indeed I know not how souls who profess to pray and meditate, to treat familiarly with God, can commit this fault, can let their mind dwell on frivolous things. Our Blessed Father says that purity of heart consists in being exempt from all mortal sin, venial sin and voluntary imperfections, as far as we are able, and he tells us that a soul wilfully cherishing the smallest imperfection, were it only an idle thought, will never attain perfection while in bondage to this thought. (*Réps. sur la 4me. Const., p.* 106.)

On New Year's eve, 1629, speaking on the renunciations required by the Rule at the end of each year, our Saint says :

All imperfect and devoid of virtue as I know myself to be yet I am astonished to see a soul who knows what it is to aspire to heaven attaching herself to things of earth where nothing is capable of satisfying the heart. If I may venture to say it, one must be somewhat of an idiot to be attached to these trifles, knowing as we do that attachments, however small, hinder our perfection. . . . . When we said: '*I choose Jesus my Lord and my God for the only object of my love. . . and the Congregation here settled for my direction* (formula of Vows) we surrendered ourselves absolutely into the hands of God and to the direction of the Congregation. Would we now, for the sake of attaching ourselves to anything, be false to our word ? We made our choice ; of our own unconstrained, free will we chose Jesus our Spouse for the only object of our love. . . . Our hearts must then, in virtue of this sacred choice, this holy election, relinquish all, abandon all into the hands of God, make a complete and holy despoliation at the foot of our Saviour's cross. Having done this, would it not be plainly going against our profession to wish this charge rather than the other ? By this choice we have bound ourselves henceforth to carry out the will of our Superiors and not our own, be those who govern us to our liking or not.

By the first choice we have bound ourselves to Jesus and are obliged never to engage our love but to Him. By the second we are equally obliged to let ourselves be guided and governed by our Superiors. (*Exh.* vii, p. 177-8.)

In giving Chapter on this 4th Constitution St. Jane Frances says :

We are not in the occasion of committing serious

faults against our vow of Chastity, but this is not enough. Our heart is the nuptial bed of our Bridegroom and we must guard it with the utmost care. Therein abides our adorable Spouse, He sojourns with us solely that we may enjoy at will His chaste embraces, His gracious presence, His familiar converse. There we can treat with Him on the interests of our soul. No need for us to go in spirit to Bethlehem, Egypt, Nazareth, Thabor, Calvary in quest of Him, nay, not even to the high Heaven, good though it be. We have simply to enter into our hearts, to recollect our thoughts and we shall find Him awaiting us, to converse with us, to caress us, to instruct us as to His will. You see, dear Sisters, we have no small obligation to keep our hearts pure and spotless and all our powers, senses and faculties well-regulated, since the God of all purity is ever reposing within us and is in the midst of us. This vow is verily one of great perfection and many, to preserve it in its integrity, have a hard fight. But of a surety if by it we have promised much to God He has promised us far more. Let us be mindful of this, for that which awaits us above is of a very different order from what we give here below. If we strive by freedom from sin to make our heart and mind a spotless couch, here on earth, whereon our heavenly Bridegroom can repose—to adorn it with the virtues of simplicity, candour, humility and love, He will, I trust, in His loving kindness, make us share the nuptial bed of His divine eternity. May He of His infinite mercy grant us this grace. (*Exh. v.*, p. 127-8.)

On the excellence and beauty of Religious life the Saint says :

We are called to a sublime, an angelic perfection in the purity of our life both of body and of mind and if we study our Rule we shall find plenty of work to do.

To lead us to this perfection our Rule does not multiply austerities, so much esteemed by the world of sense and sight ; its excellence consists in its absolute and intimate perfection of spirit. Now since it has pleased the divine goodness that in His name we should be all gathered together in this sacred desert, cut off from the world, let us make our sweet enclosure an earthly paradise and our cells the dwelling place of our Spouse —our whole monastery the place of these delights, the noontide of His love where he takes His repose, and a pleasaunce for the Angels who disdain not to come hither. You will perhaps say to me : A glorious thought indeed ! But how could we succeed in such an undertaking ? I answer : by the exact observance of your Rules, by performing all your actions in a spirit of profound, sincere and ingenuous humility, by living in perfect renunciation of your own will, by the observance of a poverty that is stripped of everything, living, breathing, thirsting for our Bridegroom alone. (*Exh.* v, p. 147 *et Entr.* xli.)

We will be pardoned for reiterating this thought upon which our Saint so loved to dwell. In the year 1631, recalling the coming of age of the Institute, she says :

The House of God is Holy Church ; the secret chamber of the King is the Religious state. Twenty-one years ago it pleased His goodness to build Himself a new secret chamber wherein we might rest and enjoy His Divine presence, His heavenly caresses. You see, my Daughters, when a king has had a secret chamber built in an ancient castle, this chamber is his delight and may be looked upon as his favourite abode. He embellishes it, he straightway fills it with delicate ornaments, scents and perfumes ; he makes it the depository of his most precious pos-

sessions. To be invited to it is a mark of his special favour for in it he holds secret converse with his guest, they two, alone with each other ; and there he entertains his dear spouse, the queen.

Our good Saviour Jesus, our sovereign King and most adorable Spouse, has been pleased in these latter days to build Himself a new secret chamber in His royal and holy House and this chamber is our little Institute. He has indeed, by peculiar, loving and fatherly care made it manifest that this building is the work of His hand, for in truth He has enriched it with many virtues and the odours He has vouchsafed to give this abode have been already diffused in divers places and greatly edify and rejoice the Church.

We are nothing but poor and contemptible creatures yet God, by an excess of goodness towards us has chosen us for His BRIDES and has made us QUEENS.

He has drawn us into this secret chamber with chains of gold, of love, of sweetness. His delight is to be with us, distributing to us His favours if in turn we find all our delight in Him. And He will continue to extend His bounties with that holy profusion which He reserves for His spouses if to be with Him be our only joy.

But when I speak thus I would not have you think that I only allude to the inward caresses which He often vouchsafes to bestow upon Religious souls, for the purer odours of crosses, mortifications and sufferings are not those of Thabor but of Calvary, and it is these that we should follow, these it is that should attract us for they are the most abiding and the most efficacious. (*Entr.* xxxviii.)

It comes to my mind, she says another day, what our Blessed Father so often said to me : " My soul is in danger if I bear it not in my hands. Often examine,"

he would say to me, " if you have your soul in your hands, if some passion, trouble or anxiety has not carried it off from you, see if you have it under your control, or if it is not rather engaged in some affection : and should you find that it has escaped you, pursue it and recapture it, but bear in mind that this must be done gently and tactfully, for were you to take hold of it by main force you would frighten it." This is what the Saint taught me and this is my counsel to you. Carry your soul, hold it, do not let it slip out of your hands that you may always have an eye to its movements. Look often lest some inclination wound it, some aversion sully it, some unruly passion disturb its equilibrium, lest some imperfect or harmful affection has not already robbed you of it : then, very gently repair the disorder, re-establishing it in its place ; that is, in God, its true centre. See, too, if it is well disposed to whatever may be God's good pleasure—quite submissive to all He permits, whether or no it is truly content and indifferent to sweet or bitter. Look moreover, if this dear soul is in a fit state to be restored to the Lord whenever He shall demand it of you. In a word, my dear Sisters, I entreat of you to act as they do who hold in their hands something they are fearful of losing; they handle it carefully, look at it often, and expose it to no danger of being mislaid. Do in like manner with your soul. So doing you will possess it, and man's chief happiness is that he possesses a thing of such great worth as his soul. (*Exh.* iv. *Sur ch.* 10*me de la Règle.*)

To Marie Aimée de Morville in allusion to her frequent visits from seculars, our Saint writes : It is impossible to enjoy the satisfactions of the world and also to enjoy the consolations of heaven. (*Lettre* dclxv.)

In a chapter on the eve of the feast of the Immaculate Conception the holy Foundress takes not only our Lady's but likewise our Lord's purity as a model for the Sisters. They are obliged, she tells them, to aim at the purity which our Lord had when, in making Himself mortal and susceptible to suffering, His only motives were the glory of God and the salvation of men, and that such should be their only motives, their sole desire.

She then points out how easy this seems to us at first sight, for it is, we think, only just and reasonable and we imagine that we can practise it off-hand. But considering it more closely, while keeping near to God, He will not fail in His goodness to show us how far we are from practising it and how greatly self-love is deceiving us. Let us reflect on what our good Saviour did for us and ask ourselves if for God's glory and the salvation of souls we have the courage to take in hand something incomparably less. Alas ! Our hearts will straightway tell us that no such courage is ours, that we are too mean, too wretched, too keen in looking after our own interests. Then, enumerating our Lord's chief sufferings throughout His Life and Passion : Now tell me, she continues, which of you would be willing, with our Divine Saviour's unparalleled purity of heart and of intention, to undertake the like ? Happy the soul who is in such dispositions ! But we are not given these great opportunities, so it is not by similar sufferings that Our Lord would have us imitate Him. His choice for us is that we should receive everything as coming from His hand, be it food, clothing, contradictions, sorrows or whatsoever He may permit, and that we should bear these crosses lovingly between Him and ourselves, purely for Him, casting forth from our hearts all that we see to be contrary to this

one end : the glory of God and the salvation of mankind.

If we keep ourselves near to God He will enlighten us and make us see our very slightest imperfections, for His goodness takes marvellous delight in pure and spotless souls.

Let us pray our glorious Mistress and Protectress, the holy dove, all fair and white, to obtain for us the grace to be faithful in cleansing our hearts, wherein we shall undoubtedly find innumerable little stains to wash away so as to make them by their candour and purity absolutely pleasing to her beloved Son. (*Exh.* ii, p. 164-5.)

Dwelling on these words of the twenty-second chapter of the Rule : *There ought not to be among you any sensual love but spiritual,* St. Jane Frances tells her Daughters that they should love no one however near or dear to them, but in God, for God, and in conformity with God. This manner of loving alone can hinder the imperfections which sometimes creep into the most spiritual friendships, for herein the heart looks first to God and loves Him in her neighbour, not her neighbour in God which is a less perfect love. So shall it be that God alone will be the supreme love of our hearts and we shall love our neighbour as dearly as is consistent with the love of God. This love will then be quite pure, with nothing to fear. To love our neighbour in God is indeed admirable but here there is sometimes danger of transgressing, because in leaving this Divine Source the wrong turn may easily be taken, the astuteness of self-love imperceptibly deceiving us ; whereas in loving God in our neighbour we can never go astray. Our holy Rule somewhere says : *Honour God whose temples you have become,*[1] *each reciprocally* in the person

[1] Chap. v.

of the others. That is, love, honour and adore God in the person of your Sisters. He who dwells in them by grace and often in reality by the most holy Communion. Let us love all our Sisters in God and God in all our Sisters, seeking in all our friendships only His glory and good pleasure and not our own satisfaction. So doing He will graciously grant us the pure and solid love of our neighbour and make the love of Himself grow in us day by day in the measure in which our hearts become detached from carnal and earthly affections. (*Entr.* xiv, p. 100.)

In a conference with the Sisters of Autun in 1626, St. Jane Frances says : Pure love cannot tolerate anything save what feeds it in the heart of which it has possession. And the soul that is deeply in love [with God] has no longer any bond of union with creatures.

Those who are in the habit of following their natural inclinations are very far removed from purity of love ; for grace and nature, divine love and self-love cannot subsist together in one same heart ; one or other is bound to perish. (*Entr.* lxx, p. 471.)

On the festival of St. John the Baptist St. Jane tells the Sisters that upon one occasion she asked St. Francis to give her some subject of consideration suitable for that feast and among other profitable thoughts he gave her this one on the Saint's detachment : "St. John," he said, "voluntarily deprived himself of seeing or speaking to His dear Master, for we have it on the testimony of holy Scripture that he never spoke to Him. Although he knew that Our Lord was preaching and making Himself known to all the world in Judea he spent twenty-five years in the desert within easy reach of Him without paying Him a single visit. (However, St. John's signal mortification merited for him the grace of enjoying Our

Lord spiritually.) Can more perfect renunciation be found than to be so near his sovereign and only love and for the love of that same love to abstain from hearing and seeing Him?" And then St. Francis, she says, added: "We must do the same in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament wherein we know that Jesus Christ resides and though we are unable to see or taste Him even in spirit, we must adore Him by faith and glorify Him in our destitution." (*Exh.* xv, p. 199.)

Our Saint once told her Daughters the following:

One day after Holy Communion Our Lord made known to me that, if a soul wishes to keep herself inwardly and outwardly exclusively for Him she need only apply to the practice of the holy Constitution on Chastity. "Every word of which," He said to me, "is divine, there is nothing therein of man, it all cometh forth from My loving Heart. I would that My spouses should be so pure, guileless and simple that they look only unto Me, think only of Me and solely for Me and not at all of their own contentment. I wish them to be fastened, stripped of all things, to the Cross with no other support thereon than My most pure love. I would have them never to refuse any humiliation, mortification or rebuff; nor anything that could bring them ever so little ignominy before creatures. In all this I have great designs for their progress in My love and if they act in this way they will give Me infinite contentment and I shall always be engaged in giving them pleasure. My Heart overflows with sweetness and goodness for souls who love Me and give themselves to Me in all sincerity, and I give Myself to them with the abundance of favours which I bestow on My spouses whom I dearly love."

The Saint adds: The reason why there are so few souls in Religion who receive extraordinary graces

from Our Lord is because there are so few who give themselves to the practice of mortification with unflinching fidelity. (Taken from a manuscript in the Monastery of Compiégne.)

In a Chapter given January, 1630, St. Jane says :

The spouse was well assured that her heart was stripped of all else when she cried in her ardour, *My Beloved is mine and I am all His.*[1] Now we may say this with her when, like her, our conscience acquits us of entertaining any affection save for the heavenly Spouse whom we have chosen ; for, of a surety, so long as we are attached to anything outside Him we shall not be fully and wholly united to Him. . . . Who seeks aught else than her God deserves not to have God. This folly of seeking the things of this low life comes from not more frequently turning our thoughts to eternity and the real joys that await us there. Ah, Sisters, shake off from your feet the mire and the dust of this fleeting, transient life ; I mean, cast off from you every affection that is not purely God and for His good pleasure. (*Exh.* vii, p. 85.)

And again :

All day and at each hour, at each moment if possible, let us raise our hearts to God. . . acquiescing straightway in whatsoever He permits. This is the true and only way of being in the disposition to receive the grace He has prepared for us. (*Exh.* xii, p. 193.)

Upon another occasion our Saint told the Sisters that her cell, solitude, mortification and prayer are the great guardians of the chaste soul and that a true Religious ought only to view any pleasure of this world through the cross of her Spouse ; that is with an eye of pitiful and unenvying disregard. (*Cœur de Ste J. F. de Chantal*, p. 58.)

In one of her instructions to the Novices, St. Jane

[1] I to my beloved and my beloved to me.—Cant. vi, 2.

tells them that they have come into Religion to unite themselves to God and the better to do this, to disunite themselves from all that is not God, but something more than this is asked of them. Our Constitution, she says, tells us that our Institute is a Mount Calvary. Hence having quitted the world our chaste Spouse makes us mount the hill of Calvary after Him. Now to make this ascent two things are necessary: first we must die to self, second we must let others do their part, allowing ourselves to be divested of self, to be flayed, our hearts made flexible to the will of another. If you resist you will be no true Spouse of Jesus Christ crucified. The heart that tends not, nor makes claim to perfection tends to perdition. (*Instruction* ii, p. 511 and 514.)

From our Saint's Retreat we have the following prayers:

My Beloved, I want to keep for Thee alone the garden of my heart. Do Thou give me the grace to set it round about with the thorns of holy mortification, to shut it off from the doors and windows of my senses that I may hold my thoughts within my garden, and my whole soul may remain completely occupied with Thee, my only consolation, my most sweet refuge. (*Oeuvres, Vol.* II, *Méditation* xi, p. 28.)

When, O my God, will the time come that I shall walk in the full understanding of my obligations? My Vows ever before my eyes, that shunning distractions, subduing the senses, evading useless reflections, I may live and breathe for Thee alone? Vouchsafe to me this grace, O God of all goodness, and that the things of earth may turn for me into bitterness and mortification so that Thou alone mayest be the delight of my soul and my thoughts may take no pleasure save in Thee and in Thy overwhelming sweetness. (*Ibid.*, p. 29.)

Section II
OBEDIENCE

St. Francis used to say that a rough file takes off more rust and polishes better than a smooth and less biting one, and that many a heavy blow of the hammer is needed to temper a keen sword blade. To obey Superiors of this calibre is, he says, like drawing clear water from a spring that flows through the jaws of a lion of bronze—like the riddle of Samson : *Out of the eater came forth the meat.* (*Jud.* xiv, 14.) It is hearing God's voice, seeing God's will alone in that of the Superior, even if the command be, as in the case of St. Peter : *Kill and eat.*[1] (*Acts* x. 13.)

But both St. Augustine and St. Francis tell Superiors that though to be feared by their subjects is desirable yet should they be much more loved.

The import of this teaching in the government of St. Jane Frances de Chantal is evident to all who study her life.

St. Francis said among the many souls whom he directed he had never met one who equalled her in the perfection of obedience.

The following trait given by Mother de Chaugy shows her manner of practising this virtue before her entrance into Religion.

In the early days of her direction by the holy Bishop of Geneva Madame de Chantal made a journey into Savoy to consult him about the affairs of her soul, he having previously arranged a certain day upon which he would await her at Sales. Now it happened that some unexpected and pressing business delayed her departure for two days. To make up for lost time she made a long journey on horseback each day and yet found it would be impossible to reach Sales in due

[1] Camus. *Spirit of St. Francis de Sales*, pp. 124, 125.

time, so she spent one whole night in the saddle amidst a heavy thunderstorm and torrents of rain. By this means she completed her journey on the appointed day. Upon her arrival St. Francis asked her why she had so fatigued herself; she simply answered: "I did not think it would have been right to use any pretext to exempt myself from your order to arrive here to-day." The gentle Bishop, who desired to see liberty of spirit in her obedience and wished her to obey from love rather to fear to disobey, told her that she should not take what he said so rigidly but rather consider the kindness of his intentions. However, Mother de Chaugy tells us that this great act of obedience delighted him.

Yet another act we must relate to show her faith in the power of this virtue. Writing to St. Francis upon one occasion she says she is not mistress of her own mind at prayer and cannot control it, that it wanders off to see and manage everything, and she begs of him to put a stop to its runaway thoughts for she thinks it would respect a positive command. In reply, he asks her why she wishes to play the part of Martha when God has shown her that He wishes her to keep to that of Mary and he says: "I command you then to remain in God or near God without trying to do anything or to make any enquiry of Him unless He move you so to do. Make no returns on self but remain near Him." Of the perfection with which our Saint kept this command only the angels can tell.[1] No less complete and full was her obedience to the Superiors who governed the convent of Annecy during the terms when she herself was not governing. We have ourselves volunteered, she would say, to embark in the great vessel of holy Obedience. We must sail then at the good pleasure of the divine will which

[1] de Chaugy, *3me partie*, ch. xv, pp. 437-8.

should be the foundation of our submission. What joy to our hearts if we can say at the hour of our death : Lord I have seen Thee only in the person of my Superior. (*Paroles Consolantes*, Vol. iii. p. 445.) Pressing home this virtue of indifference she says : We must not notice whether we like or dislike the command laid upon us by our Superior, nor whether she be of different social position from ourselves, nor must we compare her perfection with that of her predecessor. Oh, no, I beseech you to let us only regard God, who, through her, commands and governs. In her person we should obey Him lest we thereby offend His goodness. Let us consider the obedience of our good Saviour and then look at the weaknesses and imperfections of this virtue in ourselves. . . . What are our humiliations when compared to His ? What are our sufferings in comparison to those He endured ? We should often entertain such thoughts and dwell on the virtues we have learnt from Him and from His holy Mother and delight in conversing about them ; thereby we shall be enlightened, encouraged and strengthened in our undertakings. Obedience is the proper virtue of religion and can alone maintain it in its integrity. The Conferences [of our Blessed Father] teach us thoroughly the true practice of this virtue and to them we should have recourse. (*Réps. sur la* xxiii*me Const.*)

Referring the Sisters upon another occasion to these Conferences especially that on Obedience, she says : When we have a dislike to what we are commanded let us say to ourselves : *The Chalice which my Father hath given me to drink shall I not drink it* (*John xviii.* ii.) And in as much as our dislikes are our inferiors, and reason, as lady and mistress rules over them and brings them into subjection, let us bring our heart, will, judgment into line with our Obedience, per-

forming it with the single aim of pleasing God. Seeing this submission for His sake in the depths of our hearts, He will reward us for it in His eternity where He Himself will be our recompense. (*Exh.* XV, *sur le 23me ch. de la Règle.*)

In answer to a question: If we had a Superior somewhat incapable of her charge, careless of the Rule, who gave the Sisters plenty of mortifications, might they not be allowed to stray a little from the Rule, or at least would not their doing so be excusable under the circumstances? The Mother replies: Do you ask this question to make fun? However, it deserves an answer. My Daughter, that might come to pass in the most exemplary and holy religious Order, but not for all the faults that could be committed in a monastery, nor for all the ignorance and imperfections of a Superior, even though she were very troublesome, would it ever be allowable to deviate from the observance or become slack in anything whatsoever; for neither before God nor man can the faults of others serve to palliate our own. Our conscience always tells us with authority that each must bear his own burden. I quite realise that it is an incomparable blessing to religious Orders to have good Superiors, that their wise administration and good example are very advantageous and vivifying, but, for all that, their virtue or their lack of virtue will neither exonerate us before God nor be laid to our charge by Him. He should be our only impetus to duty, the only object of our love and worship. Even were our Superiors the most faulty and the most imperfect in the world it ought to make no difference to our motive of action. To God have we vowed and promised to observe our Rules and our manner of life without "if" and without "gloss"; to Him then must we always loyally and adequately keep our promise.

Upon another occasion St. Jane Frances said :

I remember the Bishop of Sens said some beautiful words to the Sisters of Melun—words that deserve to be weighed, considered, and above all put into practice. " My Sisters," he said, " they who shall look to and rely upon the holiness, the capacity, and other fine qualities of their Superior will not be directed by God." (*Entr.* lvii.)

And again : You know that the divine Master has said, speaking of Superiors, *He that heareth you heareth Me and he that despiseth you despiseth Me.* (*Luke* x, 16.)

Sisters do what they bid you and not what they do." (*Entr.* lxxiii.)

To return to the Saint's answers on the 25th chapter of the Rule she says : Assuredly since the Rule not only gives us liberty but commands us to elect our Superiors we should, having faithfully invoked God, make the best choice in our power. And if He permits that we do not choose the most suitable person we must keep up our courage, for this is a sign that God wishes us to advance thereby and to be more solidly grounded in true virtue. When practised amid contradictions, humiliations and afflictions the roots of virtue strike deepest. Let us then be patient and steadfastly keep our Rule, preparing ourselves to make generous use of whatever occasions God may give us, without being taken aback or deterred from our purpose. At the worst, three years are soon over and meanwhile we shall have opportunities of practising virtues of which, perhaps, the occasion will never return. In a word, my dearest Sisters, so long as the Superior keeps us to the observance we ought not to complain of her, nor murmur within nor without the House, nor comment on her actions but be dutiful to her. Believe me, one of the chief happinesses of a

religious soul is truly to love and reverence her Superior. (*Réps. sur la* xxv*me ch. de le Règle.*)

One evening at recreation our Mother said: My Daughters, I had a distraction in choir: I thought I will look for a Superior in this House and ask all the Sisters if they would not be quite ready to obey one who was full of whims or for whom they had but little esteem, if God so appointed. I fully expect you to answer yes—such is the good opinion I have of your virtue—Daughters, if you find in yourselves this holy determination, if you are ready to obey all Superiors whoever they may be with true humility, sincerity and submission, if you honestly feel in your heart that you are quite ready to act up to this perfection, then you may boldly say, *The Lord ruleth me*[1] I have need of nothing. Acknowledging humbly that this is a gift bestowed upon you by the divine Master, annihilate yourself before Him, offer Him lowly thanksgiving for, of a surety, this is virtue. But those who are not in these dispositions should abase themselves profoundly before the divine Majesty and confess that virtue has but a surface root in their hearts. Furthermore, observe what I am about to say, and verily I do not say it without reason nor without having well thought it over before speaking to you: To prefer to give obedience to a Superior whom we are fond of and esteem rather than another who would gainsay us incessantly, is a sure mark of a mind that does not look straight to God, that thinks only of its own interest. Such a mind does not know what *obedience* is. Sisters, anyone who desires to please God and obey His will, if his desire be genuine and his heart absolutely dependent on divine Providence, obeys any Superior whatever because he knows that all those who are in command represent Jesus Christ to him. There is no

[1] The Lord ruleth me and I shall want nothing.—Ps. xxii, 1.

better means of making progress in virtue than to have headstrong Superiors who upset all and have a rough-and-ready way of commanding. Then would be the opportunity for gathering in a full and abundant harvest of virtues, because such obedience would be solid. As for me—if I felt always as I feel at present, I bethink me that I should be delighted to have one who wou d come down on me the very first of all and, indeed, I am ready, by the grace of God, to obey any Sister, from the oldest in the Institute to the last novice, because I know where there is less of the creature there is more of God and that I should glorify Him so much the more as according to the natural man I should be less satisfied with her who commands. It is in practices of this nature that solid virtue is nurtured. I would wish to write down all that I have said to you this evening so that it might be the better impressed on your good hearts. It is God who has urged me to say it, for it is from Him alone that the least good thought comes and I have felt myself affectionately drawn to converse with you on this subject. Be then, all of you, penetrated with the one desire of complete dependence on the order of Providence. Let it be enough for us to be taken care of by this great God and let Him lead us whithersoever He will, since wheresoever His hand shall locate us we shall by obedience fulfil His adorable will. (*Entr.* xiv, *sur l'Obéissance Aveugle.*)

The will of our Lord and of those who for us hold His place is one and the same. It lives and reigns in us through our Superior, and by it we live and subsist in Him so that we can boldly say : Jesus, having offered all that we have to Thee, we now immolate to Thee all that we are, binding our liberty to the funeral pile of the Cross, so that by the sword and the fire of Thy holy love it may be, through perfect obedience, an

agreeable victim to Thy good pleasure. (*Paroles Consolantes*, Vol. iii, p. 448.)

Put all your affections into the hands of God so that they may be purified and fashioned to His liking; herein is an obedience so perfect that it has no need of being urged on by menace, recompense, law or command. (*Ibid.*)

One day, coming into the recreation-room, the Mother said: Sisters I have had such a consoling letter. My Sister, the Superior of Lyons (Bellecourt) tells me that just as she had well nigh given up thinking any more about the foundation of Puy (taking it for granted that the treaty in regard to it was either broken off or put for the time being altogether in the background) conveyances suddenly arrived sent by the town of Puy to fetch the Sisters. With them came the express order that the foundresses must set out next day. The Mother was obliged to prepare everything for their departure that same evening. It was impossible before bedtime to choose all who were to be sent, so she had perforce to wait till the morning to name them, which she did. Now not one of those dear souls who were named said a word, or made a difficulty, or asked to see anyone before starting. They all went off in perfect submission to the will of God, to work cheerfully for His glory. A grand example! I have been more cheered by it than if I had heard that the Institute had come in for a million of money. Indeed, I should make no account of a Sister, however holy she might appear, unless I saw her ready to be sent to the ends of the earth. For, to be attached to the place in which she is serving God is a sign that she loves the place and the consolations she receives there more than the God she serves there. You tell me you are quite ready to go where obedience sends you but you are sorry to leave the shrine of our

Blessed Father's body and to be separated from you old Mother, his unworthy Daughter. Ah! the Saint would have us attached to his spirit not his body and we shall find his spirit and his help everywhere. This excuse is nothing but a subterfuge of self-love, just as much as being attached to one Superior more than another. It would be a stumbling-block in your service of God. The only mark of distinction I wish for you is that of being His true servants. (*Entr.* xv.)

The following is taken from a Conference, given in 1624, entitled *The Qualities of True Zeal*:

". . . I do not want you to grow weary in the toil of perfecting yourselves but I just wish to say this: The ways and means of reaching perfection should be indifferent to you. And as regards obedience you should not permit your mind to discriminate between what is proper for you and what is not; nor to think, shall I really be able to undertake this charge or could I not do that other more successfully, for that Sister has more affinity with my turn of mind and I should get on better with her than with this one? Let go all such reflections that you may give yourself without interruption to the guidance of Our Lord. One of you is on her way to prayer, obedience takes her off straightway to employ her elsewhere. There is no question but that she will find God as much in this occupation as in her prayer, though, I grant you, it may be with less satisfaction, less sweetness of repose, but, believe me, God is better found where we find more mortification and most of all is He found in obedience. Seeking Him all, will be indifferent to you.

This divine indifference sums up the teaching of our Blessed Father—all His other lessons, humility, mortification, meekness, simplicity, the whole perfection contained in our Rules and Constitutions is practised

therein. But more than any other virtue, its exercise entails complete dependence on God's good pleasure. Our holy Founder wishes us to be faithful to it and this too is my sole desire for you, because I know, dear Sisters, that there is nothing more perfect. Oh, what tranquillity they enjoy who carry out this teaching, it leads quickly and inevitably to the highest and most sublime perfection. (*Entr.* iii.)

Explaining the manner in which we should bear the censure that the observance of our primitive Rules and Customs sometimes draws upon us, St. Jane thus concludes her remarks: Our Blessed Father said: "Though the all the world should fall away from the faith and we were left quite alone, we ought, nothing wavering, to remain immovable and constant." In like manner if it should happen that our whole Order was in a state of disorder and we were left quite alone with no longer a single Sister who kept the observance we should remain immovable and abide by it without ever swerving therefrom. (*Entr.* xliii.)

Old-established customs though but mediocre are better than new ones that appear to us more desirable. (*Lettre* mdccvi.)

In two of her Conferences on Humility and Generosity our Saint thus refers to the virtue of obedience:

My dearest Daughters, I should greatly like to see among you that true obedience which consists not only in going promptly when the bell rings—that is good—but in doing things for which we have a repugnance in the same manner as we do those which are to our mind. "Obedience," says St. Francis, "is a certain mark of humility." (*Entr.* xvi.)

And again, using a little simile of which she was fond, she says:

Leave yourself in the hands of God and of obedience

as a bit of clay that is trampled under foot, moulded and unmoulded and moulded anew—letting them do just as they wish with you. This is solid virtue. It is downright folly to desire anything apart from God because we shall neither possess God nor the thing desired, and to possess God is the enjoyment of all good. Merely to bow the head in token of obedience, although with repugnance in the inferior part, gains more for us than we should possess if we had in our hands the empire of the world. We learn this from the choice which Incarnate Wisdom made when He came down to earth. He chose not earthly greatness but to live in obedience, in submission to St. Joseph and to Mary, His Mother and, even unto the death of the cross, to His Eternal Father. (*Entr.* xvii.)

Referring again to the value of little acts of obedience, she says: The fruit of love is obedience. Our Lord has said: *He who loveth Me keepeth My Commandments.*[1] How happy we should be if we could be recognised by our loyalty to the solid virtues of our vocation, like unto the Son of God who by the works of His mission made Himself known to the world. Our Mission is perfect obedience. The words of the prophet Habacuc to Daniel should be ever in our heart and on our lips: *Servant of God, take what the Lord sends you.* (*Dan.* xiv, 36.) Thus should we receive from the hand of God and from obedience whatsoever is given us, accepting all as ordained by God. Anything done in religion is of great value and ought to be regarded and accomplished with devotion, however small. But any such devotions as may intercept our attention to our least observance are unquestionably counterfeit. Obedience glorifies God and when we fail therein we take from His glory as much as in us lies. (*Entr.* xxvii.)

[1] He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me.—John, xiv. 21.

Because of the great importance St. Jane Frances attributes to the value of attention to the little things, which virtue she inculcated with unceasing solicitude, we risk the disapproval of the reader by giving yet another instruction of hers on this point :

Speaking on the 12th chapter of the Rule wherein zeal for the perfection of the Sisters is recommended, she says : I have told you before dear Sisters and now I tell you once again that there is no fault to be found with you concerning your vow of chastity, the holy Spouse Himself being the guardian of your hearts. . . . But this is not the case in regard to obedience. She then points out the want of attention to certain little recommendations of obedience for the good order of the House and mentions them in detail. I know well, she continues, that the will does not concur in these little failings but for all that they manifest a want of zeal for this great virtue. . . . Obedience is the bond and perfection of religion ; take it away and the monastery becomes at once like a secular house. Nothing is truer than that fidelity to little things ensures the bestowal of great things from God ; thereby we entice Him to give us many favours.

Let us then, I pray you, be very exact in this matter. You know how sincerely our saintly Father desired it by these words of his to Sister Simplicienne : " If I were living as you are in this House I should hope to draw on myself choice graces from our Lord by being very attentive to the least orders of our Mother and to the smallest observances of the Rule." (*Exh. vi, sur le 12me ch. de la Règle.*)

And in another instruction :

I must tell you quite candidly, my dear Sisters, that I am very glad to speak to you of obedience. We are gathered together here to conquer ourselves that one day we may reckon the victories we shall

have gained and tell them all to Our Lord, that as valiant victors He may lead us into the place of His repose. *None shall speak of victory but the obedient man.*[1] To him alone who is obedient is, I think, this privilege given. What glory for us poor little creatures to be granted the favour of one day going before the throne of our glorious and lovable Bridegroom to narrate the conquests, little though they be, won for love of Him. O my God, that the phantom satisfaction of doing our own will should rob us of immortal glory!

Now there are four forms of obedience. The first, which is common to all, is obedience to the divine commandments. We ought to labour without ceasing to observe perfectly that commandment in which all the others are included: *Love God with all your heart, with all your strength, all your powers, and your neighbour as yourself.* Nay; more than yourself, for you should willingly cede preference to him, putting yourself to inconvenience for the sake of his convenience.

The second is to the will of God, and, although I am deficient in the practise of this form of obedience notwithstanding the incomparable love and desire God has given me for it, yet would I like to plant in the deepest recesses of your hearts an affectionate desire to obey indifferently, to submit lovingly to all events, appointments and permissions of this holy Providence; for in heaven, earth or hell, nothing is done but by its wise and adorable order, disposal or permission. Not a leaf falls, as infallible Truth has said, without the will and providence of our heavenly Father.

The third obedience is to our Rules, Constitutions and Customary. By it we are required to know and thoroughly understand all that belongs to the Institute so as to observe it to the letter and in its entirety

[1] An obedient man shall speak of victory.—Prov. xxi, 28.

according to time and season. It is ordered in the Constitution that we should be gentle, humble, cordial, frank one towards another just as it is that we should rise at 5 o'clock and dine at 10. We practise the two last exactly but are we equally exact in trying to practise frankness, cordiality, modesty, detachment, despoliation, mortification? We must, from time to time, look into ourselves and ask ourselves are we as ready in our submission to what we do not like as to what is in our taste?

The fourth obedience is to the orders, important or unimportant of our Superiors, to us individually and to all in common, yes, even, our Saint repeats, those small obediences given for the good order of the House. Though the thing commanded may be small, I do not think that your merit, if you observe them, will be small. For God thereby makes trial of your faithfulness. There is no surer sign of God dwelling in a soul than to see it established in a humble, exact and faithful observance. You all know that the hair and the eye of the Spouse equally ravished the heart of the Beloved. . . .

Oh, my Sisters! Obedience is the the crown of the Religious, his bulwark, and his stay, his peace, his repose, his surety. The obedient man alone lives in the holy liberty of the children of God. It is his delight to be ordered to do things hard and difficult, he accepts them joyfully, he rejoices in insignificant, painful and abject commands, and he faithfully and carefully carries them out, never throwing the burden of them on others.

St. Jane Frances concludes this chapter with the following appeal to her Daughters: This Congregation is not founded on austerities but on the solid basis of complete renunciation, mortification and annihilation of the will and on that perfect obedience which is

the nurse, guardian and mother of true inward virtue Hence, to acquire such obedience should be our chief care. And so, dear Sisters, if you have any charitable and loving affection for me as I believe you to have, although I am so unworthy of it (and yet for all that God has given you into my charge) I would ask you to give me the sweet consolation of seeing you advance more and more in the perfection of this virtue, be it God's signified will or that of His good pleasure.

Go in peace, my Daughters, and strive to practise what God has willed me to say to you for your good and my consolation. (*Exh.* iii, *sur la Const. de l'Obéissance.*)

Returning to the same subject in her next Exhortation, the Saint says : Obedience produces humility and is preserved by it. These two virtues so closely allied conquer, by the grace of God, all their enemies.

Let us consider seriously if we are giving Our Lord all we promised Him by our vow of obedience. There are six conditions with which we are bound to obey : We must obey humbly, simply, straightforwardly, promptly, faithfully and cordially as we should our own mothers. This is no small matter. Make your examination on these six conditions, and if you find you have been faulty in any of them, correct yourselves.

Press forward, dear Sisters, travail at your perfection, tarry not on the road for you know not the hour when you shall hear the cry: *Behold the Bridegroom cometh.*[1] The Master is here to whom you must render account of how you have kept your vows. (*Exh.* iv, *Ibid.*)

A Sister asks : What are our spiritual enemies ? Our spiritual enemies, my Daughter, are our own

[1] Matt. xxv, 6.

will, our own judgment, the world, our passions, inclinations and the spirit of evil, over all of which obedience carries away the victory.

Sometimes we think our obedience is full and perfect because we render it with a genuine and good heart. But when God comes to examine it it will, perchance, be in His eyes profitless because we have performed it impelled by our own inclinations, or by the mere love and esteem which we have for our Superiors and not for Him.

We should often purify our intention, readjusting it if we find we are not obeying solely because it is the will of God. From this manner of obeying comes our happiness, our weal, our contentment. (*Réps. sur la Const. de l'Obéissance.*)

The following are a few extracts from the Mother's instructions to her novices :

Make it a matter of conscience if you fail, I do not say in prompt obedience for that is a serious fault for a novice, but in the very smallest ordinance, the very least practice. This is so necessary for you that if you do not undertake to perform punctually these little virtues you will never attain to great and high ones. In the spiritual life we must walk in the lowly ways before we can master the heights. If you are not humble and obedient you will be but phantoms of Religious. (*Inst.* iii.) God has given us our free will that we may make use of it as an impetus to raise our souls to the highest perfection. He acts like a king who would come to you and say : Sister, here is my only son, I place him in your hands, I wish you to bring him up ; take great care of him and you shall be well rewarded. Think how honoured you would feel, how anxious to satisfy the king, what a big reward you would anticipate and how you would look forward to being one day the faithful friend of this little prince.

The king says : ask for anything you require for him. I will spare nothing that is needed.

Now your soul is the well-beloved daughter of the Eternal Father and He asks you to take the same care of it as of the king's son. . . . *Ask*, He says, *and it shall be given to you, knock and it shall be opened to you.*[1] He tells you that you ought to ask of Him all the virtues needed to bring your soul to perfection. These are the words of holy writ which Our Lord has uttered with His own sacred mouth. Ask then with absolute filial confidence for He will never fail to give what He knows to be necessary for our progress in virtue. But He will exact a severe account of the way in which we have made use of all these graces, Therefore, I entreat you, let there be no lack of correspondence on your part. (*Ibid.*, xiv.)

In the course of another instruction our Saint propounds certain difficulties to which a novice may be liable. For instance she says : One of you loves solitude and recollection ; this tendency should not be mortified, nor is this novice to become dissipated ; it is enough if she conforms her desire for solitude to whatever may be God's will for her, and meekly accept causes of distraction and diversion when obedience so ordains ; or, you have an inclination to see your family, to think and speak of the world, to hold to your own opinions and the like. It is in these things, my Daughters, that we must seriously and courageously mortify ourselves. When the inclination to think about the world and thoughts that you cannot hinder come to you, as they will, you must so treat them and reject them that the enemy will be afraid to set them before you again, or, if he does, you will leave them outside the door and not even look at them, save from time to time to cast upon them an eye

[1] Luke xi, 9.

of scorn such as they deserve. This is the way that valiant and generous souls make war on themselves. But remember to deal your first blows firmly and with vigour, otherwise your enemies will gain such strength that you will be unable to conquer them and will remain all your life immortified, troubled, restless and devoid of inward peace. Oh, my Daughters, my Daughters, slay your enemies, put to death valiantly this self of yours ; it only seeks your ruin and by its death you will gain peace and the life of your soul. Hearken with the ears of your heart to what this divine Master says to you : *If you will come after Me deny yourself take up your cross*,[1] that is, take every opportunity great and small that I give you of mortifying yourself you will find it in the observance and so *follow Me*, incline your ear to the voice of My inspiration, forget your people and your father's house, serve Me, love Me, and learn in My school that I am meek and humble of heart. (*Ibid.*, xvi.)

We must work faithfully yet we must not undertake all the virtues together but one after another ; for this reason I gave you last month the challenge of attention to little things and this month I am giving you that of obedience with its two appendages, promptitude to the exercises and simplicity. You must all your lives, dear Daughters, apply to this holy obedience and all your actions must be directed to this end. If you observe silence, condescension to your Sisters, or practise any point of the Rule, let it be done with the intention of obeying, giving to all the merit of holy obedience. I do not want you next month to come and tell me that you have committed many faults and that you have not thought about the challenge. Oh, no, Daughters, think of it and I myself will do the same and if I

[1] Luke ix, 23.

commit great faults against it I will come and tell you faithfully. (*Ibid.*, xviii.)

In her Spiritual Retreat the Saint writes :

Let us consider what is the religious obedience we have vowed. " It is a complete renunciation of all human will, a voluntary death, a life without curiosity, a safe road, on which one does not seek for excuses before God, a sure voyage without risks, a tomb of our will and an awakening of humility."

Taking the above quotation from St. Climacus, St. Jane continues : If you do not practise obedience aright you expose your soul to all the evils contrary to the above named goods. She then portrays Our Lord's life of daily obedience at Nazareth, for it was there, she tells the Sisters, that He began the monastic life.

The Religious who wishes to have any will of her own in the monastery does not model herself on her Spouse, and at the Judgment Day she will deserve to be classed with the worldling and the headstrong. (*Ibid.*, *Méd.*, x.)

Mother de Chaugy tells us that one of St. Jane Frances's chief maxims in her government was not to render the yoke of religion heavy by loading her subjects with new obediences, for she said that a Religious had enough to do in obeying her Rule. That the yoke of religion is light because God makes us love it but that, in as much as it is a yoke, it tames nature and brings it into subjection. That Superiors ought to keep up the courage of their subjects that they may be able to bear this yoke all their lives without wearying of it. Speaking of delinquents she says : The repentance of a contrite heart is great when it perceives that it is treated with kindness. Never, in giving correction, did she use words of contempt or reproach ; or that in any way expressed disdain and she knew well

how to *correct the fault and yet comfort the offender.* She was wont to say that one of her greatest trials as Superior was the obligation of correcting and giving penances which she, nevertheless, regarded as essential to the preservation of religious life. (*de Chaugy*, p. 467.)

The following prayer is from her Retreat :

O, my God, I confess that in obedience all is safe and sure, that apart from it all is hazardous. In giving liberty to my own will I have given the lie to my Vow and profession. Grant that I may regard the meanest things with veneration, as exercises in which I may the more easily imitate Thy sacred Humanity in its abasement and humiliations. May I lovingly rejoice in holy obedience and find therein my meat and my most delicious food. (*Méd.* x.)

Section III

POVERTY

St. Jane Frances preached well on poverty because her own life was the reflex of all she taught. In speaking of one of her foundations, she writes, alluding to its extreme poverty :

" We allowed this new rose tree to grow quietly with the thorns of many urgent wants which, indeed, we felt but the sufferings gave us great hope that the roses would be all the more beautiful."[1]

And to a Jesuit Father : " We never complain of poverty ; it is the most valuable treasure that a servant of God can possess." She was enamoured with the Sisters of Crémieux who concealed their poor condition from the world and worked hard for their livelihood.[2]

The countless acts of heroic poverty related in the life of this Mother justify her in speaking with

[1] Chaugy, *Mémoires*, 3*me partie*, p. 432.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 433.

authority, and elucidating the many facets of this wonderful and heaven-reaching virtue.

. . . . . .

Speaking on the Constitution on Poverty our Saint says :

This article practised exactly and cheerfully comprehends all that can be said for the perfection of the virtue of poverty—a virtue so excellent and so highly praised by Our Lord and the Saints, and yet, frequently so badly observed, for, to say the least, many who have vowed it have small love for it. Not that I say this of you who, thank God, observe an exact community [of goods] and have nothing of your own. Yet, such is not enough ; over and above this it is required of us to be glad when we are without things that are not only useful but necessary, and in no way to lament the deprivation of them. This is to practise poverty. But the simple fact of being in want of anything does not constitute the practice of this virtue.

Superiors certainly, who are in poor communities must be careful not to complain within or without the monastery. Both God and the world resent it. They should let few people know of their difficulties and only such as can provide a remedy ; nor should they ever exaggerate them. Let them keep firmly rooted in their hearts the words of Our Lord : " Seek first the kingdom of God and His justice and all things needful for this temporal life shall be given us,"[1] bearing the while their burden manfully.

" Cast thy care and thy thought upon the Lord and He will sustain thee."[2] This ought to be enough for us. Our Blessed Father was wont to say that souls dedicated to God should have no other to-morrow than

[1] Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and all these things shall be added unto you.—Luke xii, 31.

[2] Ps. Liv., 23.

Divine Providence. Assuredly to be over anxious about temporals would diminish, nay, ruin, our primitive spirit, for we began in very great poverty and entire trust in the providence of God.

The Daughters of the Visitation should adapt themselves to the little wants and contradictions which, in numberless ways, they daily meet with, embracing them and heartily welcoming them in the order in which providence presents them. For we must remember that we are poor and the poor have not always all things necessary. (*Réps. sur la Const. de la Pauvreté.*)

With that well-balanced mind that never drives a virtue beyond the limits of its just relationship with some other virtue, her prudence here adds a word for the less perfect. Though poverty, she says, is holy and lovable, yet when it is extreme it is to be feared that the spirit of poverty may perish and may lead to serious failings, at least with souls that are somewhat weak. But she goes on to say, for the generous who, by exact observance faithfully seek the kingdom of God, neither their daily bread nor any real necessity shall ever fail them.

And turning to the question of foundations :

When spiritual and temporal requirements are found in a small town it is incredible how much repose is there enjoyed. Being rarely diverted by the visits of seculars the Sisters occupy themselves entirely with Our Lord and in their vocation and this greatly preserves the spirit of religion. (*Réps. sur la 2me Article du Coutumier.*)

In an exhortation on the vow of Poverty, given in 1630, the Saint takes occasion to speak of the pestilence, wars and consequent desolation of the whole country and of the way in which God was shielding the Sisters from the terrible sufferings of the times. Nearly everyone, she says, is dying of hunger while we

have food, though not, indeed, in superfluity, yet in abundance. We go to the refectory and receive in silence from the hand of God all that is needful for our sustenance, eating what obedience sets before us, with no angry husband throwing dishes about, no ill-tempered mother-in-law to worry us with her tiresome ways. Times of silence are arranged for us to enable us to keep near God without the distraction of creatures. We enjoy our recreations with more tranquillity than any prince or princess in Christendom. We have not to wade through the mud to receive the holy Sacrament, nor to wait two hours at the confessional as ladies of the world sometimes have to do and then go home without confessing. Weigh all these things in the balance of the sanctuary and then think what should be our humble gratitude to God.

Outside these walls such is the state of upheaval that one knows not when one's life may be taken. Skirmishing parties are raiding the country, killing and robbing. Maidens are violated, women dishonoured and their husbands killed ; the widow and the orphan are oppressed, the opulent are in hunger, the well-to-do artisans dying of famine. From all these disasters the kind and merciful goodness of God has protected us, to show us how loyal a Master He is to those who have left all to follow Him. But He wills that we, likewise, should suffer and accept, with a lovingly submissive heart, as our share, little inconveniences, humiliations, mortifications and corrections. Let us say to Him then the while : Lord Thou hast set me free from these great evils from which those in the outside world are suffering but, my God, to make up for that I will welcome with love every occasion that comes to mortify, to annihilate, to die to self, I will never lose one single opportunity. . . .

Be faithful, loving and constant to the observance

of all that we have promised and He will be satisfied. Let our compassion for our neighbour be genuine and our prayers for him unceasing. A hundred times a day, if possible, we should weigh the benefits we have received from the hand of God and that, as I have already said, in the balance of the sanctuary. It is well to employ the time of recollection in comparing the sufferings we might be undergoing in our own homes with the good things we are now receiving in religion, lest we be ungrateful and unmindful of them.[1] Make this comparison, I exhort you seriously before God, and it will be a profitable occupation for your minds. She who is ungrateful, believe me, dear Sisters, is preparing for herself a severe chastisement from God in this world or in the next. To be in the House of the Lord, in His vineyard, is an incomparable privilege but we must be careful therein to make use of our talents that we may not be taken unawares and counted, when the day of reckoning with the King shall come, as unprofitable servants. If we do not work in His vineyard to please Him and to earn wages we shall be adjudged worthless. His goodness to us brings consolation to my heart. Profit by all I now say to you, my dear Daughters, for it is for you that Our Lord has given it to me. (*Exh.* vi, pp. 129-32.)

. . . . We have every reason to keep ourselves humble and to be exceedingly grateful both to God and our good Mother Religion which so well supplies our little requirements. I do not mean to say that nature is always content, for it is insatiable if not under the dominion of reason, but that all that is necessary is in charity provided for us. (*Réps. sur le 4me ch. de la Règle.*)

In her next Exhortation our Saint continues the same subject. She says :

[1] See note, p. 46.

The vow of poverty is one of our great vows. We do not, I fear, take sufficiently into account the despoliation to which the perfection of it obliges us to aspire. I know of course that if we are satisfied with observing it in a broad sense it is only necessary in order to be saved to possess nothing of this world, however small, as our own. But in what do you think the purest poverty consists, the admirable observance of this virtue? It consists not only in having nothing of our own and being attached to nothing that is given us for our use, but in rejoicing in the lack of real necessities, in being glad that the worst of everything in the House should be given us. If it was permitable to choose, the soul that is truly poor would take for her part only what others had refused, whatever is worthless and of least account. Not only does this perfect poverty strip itself of material things and bodily comforts, but, going further, it fathoms the very recesses of the heart and mind, denuding the soul of what gives her keenest spiritual pleasure. This is to aspire to the practice of true poverty of spirit which casts out from the soul all ardent and superfluous longing for perfection, while hiding from her her progress, causing her meekly to suffer the nakedness and the deprivation of inward spiritual goods. Meanwhile she sees those around her advance in perfection while, in her own eyes, she remains poor, bare and imperfect; albeit she turns to account her holy poverty of heart, and not only rejoices in the good of others, but takes pleasure in the very consciousness that to those around her her imperfections, miseries and shortcomings are all manifest.

The virtue of poverty also demands complete surrender of judgment, will, mind and body into the hands of our Superiors, handing over willingly the usage and disposal of them so that we may be impoverished in

all these ways. In a word ; the soul that is poor must aspire to such an utter stripping of self as to live a life that is simply angelic.

Perfect poverty likewise calls upon us not to waste our affections upon creatures but to wish to be destitute of their love . . . for particular friendships in a religious family are absolutely contrary to that poverty of spirit which strips itself of all with no reserves.

I conjure you then in the name of Our Lord to consider attentively the strict obligations we are under of loyally keeping this vow and how far-reaching it is. Blessed shall they be who at the hour of death can say with truth : Behold Lord for thee I have been poor and destitute of earthly goods all my religious life, and now I go hence lightly into Thy arms stripped of all. No one thing of earth binds me. On the other hand, woe to those who at that last passage shall be found to possess aught. May God in His mercy keep us from the desire of anything but Himself, His grace, His love, and His eternal glory. (*Exh.* vii, pp. 83-5.)

And again she says :

Not without reason has Our Lord said : *Blessed are the poor in spirit*, for those who have the love of poverty already possess the kingdom of God. (*Entr.* xxvii.)

It [poverty] so emancipates the heart as to leave it equally content with or without created things.

Another form of poverty forsaketh all things for the love of God not only in fact but in affection, thereby the more perfectly to serve Him. Indeed, when we have true and perfect poverty of spirit the whole mind is occupied with God alone. Oh, how immensely rich do we become through this virtue, for by it we possess God and the treasure, the riches of heaven and of earth ! Let such be our poverty, seeking, wishing, attaching ourselves to naught else but

God. Then, of a surety, we shall be happy and enjoy great peace and great freedom of spirit. (*Entr.* xxviii.)

If the attachment of the Apostles to the sacred Humanity of Our Lord became an obstacle to the descent of the Holy Ghost upon them, what hindrance, I pray you, will not be wrought by the attachment and affection which we have to the perishable things of this life, to creatures, to ourselves? Let us break then with all that is not God. (*Entr.* xxxviii.)

Speaking at Chapter on the Rule in regard to the sick, St. Jane says:

When sick we must receive what is given us as the poor receive an alms. We have made a vow of poverty and the poor man simply asks that an alms may be given him for the love of our Saviour. So should we receive what is given us in this same spirit; for we are poorer than the poor, and all that religion gives us is given for charity. If we so act God will bless us and there will be no murmuring, nor complaining, nor giving way to peevishness. But instead, we shall be thankful and grateful. (*Exh.* x, p. 89-90.)

And on the same subject:

Thank God the charitable support of the infirm reigns in this House. But there is something I want to mention: It is a certain nonsensical self-love that is creeping in amongst us. There are some who when they have anything amiss, or feel unwell, do not tell the Superior but let it somehow be known, so that it may reach her. This comes of nothing but pride. They want to appear very generous and not to speak of their ailment, but, for all that, they will have it known. They stand on one leg, then on another, they appear out of breath, press their hand to their forehead; pretty practices these for the servants of God. Ah, what they want is that the Superior should guess their ailment and say with sympathy:

My child, you are not well ; won't you go and lie down or take something ? Sisters, we must walk on the high road of the Rule. All these foolish ways are too tender for a Daughter of the Visitation, who ought to be generous, courageous, strong. We act in this way on the pretext of observing the counsel of our Blessed Father : *To ask for nothing.* Excuse me, Sisters, we have not yet arrived at that, for when we do we will suffer between God and ourselves, without talking about it, and without wishing others to pity us and to tell our ailments. If you are ill, come and say so simply and you will be relieved charitably without all these contrivances which are foreign to the spirit of simplicity. Blessed be the soul who seeks God alone without self-satisfaction in health and in sickness ; such a one has continual peace of heart. (*Exh.* xi, p. 92-3.)

St Jane also says : Not, in all simplicity, to mention your infirmities and ask for what might relieve them, as is enjoined in the constitution, entails reflections as to whether or no you ought to ask, and this is to fail in simplicity. Such Sisters fall short of the Rule quite as much as if they did not go to the choir or the refectory when the bell calls them. What our Holy Founder meant by his maxim : *Ask for nothing and refuse nothing*, was that we were not to ask for superfluities. Things needful and useful according to the Rule are to be asked for, and so he wished his words to be understood. (*Entr.* i, pp. 401-2.)

And again treating of the same subject, our Saint says :

Simplicity and ingenuousness are very attractive, as, on the contrary, are the qualities opposed to these virtues extremely repellent to God and man.

But the Mother does not express these sentiments without a word of advice to those whose indisposition

may be nothing more than a little cowardice ; so she adds :

We must, as our Blessed Father used to say on such occasions, take an ounce of courage instead of an ounce of bread and wine. (*Réps. sur la* xvi*me Const.*)

On the community of spirit demanded by the vows of poverty St. Jane Frances says :

Have we a repugnance to give up anything, we must at once by force of reason repress this feeling lest we might act upon it. Otherwise we should be putting greater obstacles than we think in the way of our progress and going contrary to the vow which Our Lord so greatly loved and practised. Although such faults are not mortal they would detain us in purgatory or at least retard our perfection. Be extremely careful on this point, my dear Sisters, for we must not become attached to anything however small, so that if it be required of us we may be always ready and willing to part with it.

When we ask God for some grace or virtue we should ask it also for our Sisters ; the desire for their perfection ought to be so one with our own that, as the desire grows in us in the same measure should we wish it to grow in them. In fact, in religion everything must be in common ; our inward as well as our outward goods, but most of all should our will and judgment be in common, nay, even God Himself must we share for as our Blessed Father used to say " Even Our Lord does not will to be so much the property of one as not to belong to all." (*Réps. sur le* 3*me ch. de la Régle.*)

Speaking of the time given to the decoration of a Paradise.[1] and the great expense incurred thereby our Saint condemns a certain desire to surpass others, as favouring a want of humility and dissipating the

[1]An ornamental grotto or place of devotion in a convent or its grounds.

spirit of devotion amid all the bustle of the erection and adornment of these places. It is not, she continues, that I wish to condemn your little contrivances to have what is proper, but beyond that I would not have you go. Believe me, God will be more pleased with our tranquillity near Him, and that with freedom of mind and body we should be able to apply to our ordinary exercises than with the loss of time and the worries these things entail. (*Réps. sur la Const. de la Pauvreté.*)

The following are a few thoughts from the *Paroles Consolantes* on the virtue of Poverty :

It is the glory of the Sulamites to be able to say in truth : *My Beloved is mine and I am all His.*[1] O my Daughters, let us muster all our affections round Our Lord and no one will become attached to us nor we to any creature.

Oh, how good it is to see the servants of God gain their livelihood as the Apostles did by the work of their hands.

The desire to have all kinds of conveniences in our employments so that nothing be wanting to us is not compatible with our vow of poverty—a vow of such worth that our Blessed Father used to call it " a delicious Mistress." Let us, too, be wholly in love with it.

If the Daughters of the Visitation but knew the desire their Holy Founder had that they should be little in every way, and what an aversion he had to a superfluity and abundance of temporal things, I believe they would feel ill at ease unless they lived in some little want of exterior things, some little deprivation of what was necessary.

Eschew all desire of having your conveniences. Love poverty, and God will heap upon you His divine

[1] My beloved to me and I to him.—Cant. ii, 16.

riches. Such is our Blessed One's true spirit. Any eagerness about one's temporal comforts, any solicitude concerning them, was insupportable to him ; but when he saw souls love and esteem poverty it was a true delight to him. Alas ! we have made a vow of poverty, and it is but right and fitting that we should cherish it more than the riches which we have renounced, and it is with the Almighty that this contract has been made.

Blessed are we if we joyously embrace poverty, remaining submissive and in repose in the bosom of our heavenly Father, without wavering one single moment in the deep-rooted trust we should have in His goodness.

Ladies of the world and rich folk are usually idle, and do not work, but the servants of God ought to look upon themselves as poor people in His House, and therefore should be laborious. I notice that our poor Houses are always particularly rich in fervour, joy, and suavity, and that our Lord makes spiritual graces abound where there is great temporal poverty.

Our Blessed Lord in order to repair the disorders which the love of riches produced on earth practised the most severe and denuded poverty that His ardent charity could invent, for He lived in the deprivation of honour, of goods, of conveniences, and even of the necessities of life. Love made Him do all this, and it is this same love, our Blessed Father says, which obliges us to the practice of a poverty so stripped of all things that we reserve God alone for our portion.

The true followers of Jesus Christ like poverty to be the only adornment of their sacristies, dormitories, refectories and other places of abode. Indeed I am ashamed to see Sisters who have made a vow of poverty show such concern about their clothing. Alas! this is very far from the way in which true

monks and true nuns live. How unlike we are to St. Paul who was content when he had but what sufficed to subdue hunger and to cover his nakedness. Good God, how few of us have the spirit of perfect poverty! Try (my Mother) to engrave it deeply in the hearts of your Daughters, and do not suffer them to be solicitous about themselves, nor to anticipate their necessities To do so is against the vows and against the Rule.

To know how to satisfy oneself with what God puts into our hands is to follow the example of the angels, who by their nature have no desires. It is in a manner to re-enter into the state of innocence and to emulate the original liberty of our first parents. Let us then learn how to content ourselves with God, and we shall by this means entice the divine Goodness to pour His gifts with abundance into our souls. Thus denuding ourselves of all created things in order to unite ourselves wholly to God, we shall make it manifest that the only good we seek is the solid treasure of His love, and His grace.

The more stripped God sees us of exterior possessions, of family, of friends, or reputation, the more abundantly will He give us His most precious graces. (Vol iii, pp. 405 *sq.*)

CHAPTER IV

HUMILITY AND MORTIFICATION

When St. Francis undertook the spiritual direction of St. Jane Frances de Chantal he advised her to root deep in her heart the virtue of humility and, guided by the Holy Spirit, he helped her in the task. To be despised, he told her, was now to be her glory ; and the sense of her own miseries, abjection and insignificance her crown.[1]

The holy widow so faithfully walked in the path thus traced out for her that those who were observant in the ways of God did not fail to see in her capabilities of attaining to the high states of the mystic life, and urged her to make progress therein. But St. Francis, to whom she appealed, answered, " No, no, be content with spinning the threads of the little virtues, of humility, gentleness, mortification, simplicity and others suitable to widows. He who tells you otherwise is deceiving you and is himself deceived.[2]

In reply to another letter he tells her it is always better not to speak of oneself either in praise or in blame.

Yet sometimes forgetful of this Golden Rule and impatient of her own shortcomings, St. Jane's natural impetuosity would break out ; as when, one day, recommending an invalid to the prayers of the sisters,

[1] de Chaugy, *Mémoires*, 3*me partie*, ch. xvii, p. 449.
[2] *Ibid.*

she added : I also recommend myself to your prayers as I have a fever that is much more dangerous, it is that of self-conceit. I have enough of it to make me conscious that it reeks. (J'ai prou de quoi sentir la puanteur en moi).[1] When this holy woman suffered calumnies and humiliations from ecclesiastics who ought to have known better, and, too, from the busy tongues of Court gossip ; the same simple earnestness characterised her acceptance of them. She once owned that were it not that she feared to put to confusion some who had spoken of her in a contemptuous and cutting manner she would have knelt at their feet to thank them for rendering her this good office, so profitable were their words to her soul. Ofttimes, to the certain knowledge of others, she bore insults and reproach without making known her innocence, only saying : " We must bless God for everything and not excuse ourselves." Her practice of this virtue is summed up in these words spoken of her by St. Francis de Sales : " The excellence of the humility of this holy soul consists in concealing her humility."[2]

As mortification is implied in humility and, in its earlier stages, inseparable from it, St. Jane unites these two virtues in her teaching. Her own manner of practising the virtue of humility having been observed by Père Binnet, S.J., he concluded that a fourth vow to this effect was made at the Visitation and one day asked her if this were not so.

Upon which she replied : " My dear Father. It is my desire that we should practise humility as faithfully as if we had vowed it."[3]

With this end in view St. Jane Frances gave her spiritual children the following instructions :

To humiliate herself must be the chief care of the

[1] de Chaugy. 3*me partie*, ch. xviii, note, p. 459.
[2] *Ibid.*, 3*me partie*, ch. xviii, p. 461.
[3] de Chaugy, *Mémoires*, 3*me partie*, p. 447.

soul.—I see no Rule in the whole Institute more pregnant nor which urges me more than this : *to do all things in the spirit of profound and sincere humility.* When we say all, we except nothing. Our Blessed Father used to say it is equivalent to being told that in everything we do and aim at, our chief care and intention must be to abase and humble ourselves. I entreat you then, Sisters, let us not put ourselves forward but seek to remain in the background, under the shade of our lowliness and abjection, desiring only to be conspicuous therein. How happy shall we be if we live in this spirit of humility, this annihilation of ourselves ; then will our good God look upon us with love and be glorified in our littleness. Let us deem ourselves the least useful servants in the House of God, and love to be accounted and treated as such. This low esteem of ourselves should be remarked in us, because it is essentially our spirit. It is a virtue that our Blessed Father never ceased inculcating. If we read how he speaks of it we shall see that the only glory he would have us seek is the love of our own abjection, contemplating the while, this virtue in Our Lord, who said of Himself that He was a worm and no man, the reproach of men and the outcast of the people. When we consider these words how ashamed and humbled we should feel, and what titles of honour could we desire ?—As far as we possibly can let us prevent one another in humility.

Then, telling the Sisters that she would willingly give her life's blood to obtain it for them, she continues: You wish me to tell you some particular practices of humility. I think the following are good :

To be open and candid in confession.

To welcome correction, and frankly to accuse ourselves of our faults. To receive humiliations, contradictions, and the like, which give us pain or cause

us confusion, not only as trials sent from God but much more as things which we deserve in chastisement for our sins and to lower our pride. To rejoice in being reproved and accused of things of which we are not guilty, in imitation of Our good Saviour.

Not to desire to be loved in particular, for this desire proceeds from the good opinion we have of ourselves, and it results in vain and useless complacency.

To receive willingly all kinds of obediences, and carry them out with submission of judgment, and to love most of all those that humble us.

To esteem each one above ourselves.

Never to play the mistress, the teacher, the person who knows everything, but rather the disciple.

To belittle and humble ourselves in everything.

To rejoice humbly when what we do is disapproved of and disliked, and to join with others in the disapproval.

To wish to be held as useless in the Monastery, and only to be employed in it for low and abject things, provided that this desire does not come from discouragement, but from the love of humiliation and of our own abjection.

To be simple in letting the Superior see the good and the bad in our character. Not to speak of ourselves or of what appertains to us.

To wish only the common good and not any private interest.

Never to be astonished at our faults, for this astonishment proceeds from ignorance, from not knowing our own native meanness and weakness, and the trouble it causes comes infallibly from pride.

Not to disapprove of what others do, to praise whatever little good we may see in it.

To rejoice sincerely when other Religious Orders are

extolled above ours, having no wish that anything should be seen in us save our lowliness and abjection.

In a word; the summit of perfect humility lies in absolute and entire dependence, and submission of all that we are to the holy will of God and our Superiors, in cordially loving our abjection, and the contempt of ourselves, yet not a studied contempt, but a complete surrender of self to God, in absolute indifference whether or no we be loved, honoured, or despised; held in good or bad repute.

When we fail in the fidelity we owe to God in the exercise of virtue it is a good practice to strive to regain by humility what we have lost by our cowardice, to abase ourselves before God, peacefully and tranquilly, and then gently begin again to do right with renewed trust in God. Though we should fall fifty times a day, let us rise again as many times with simplicity, without wasting thought in self-reflections on what we have done, which is often a greater fault than the fault from which we rise. A high value must be set on purely humble souls because they are rare. (*Réps. 22me Const.*)

The little virtues of simplicity, love of abjection and of humiliations which the great saints so fostered in their hearts as a protection against vainglory become, if practised with the ardour of divine love, more agreeable to God than the greatest actions done with less love. (*Oeuvres*, t. iii, p. 527.)

Repeating a Sister's question, the Mother answers her thus: You cannot, you say, help greatly esteeming your Order because you see in it a very admirable and solid enablement for arriving at perfection. But it is not, my Sister, that you are to look down upon it; far from that, you must highly esteem it because it comes from God, belongs to God and is, in very truth, good and holy. What our Blessed Father

means by remaining in the knowledge of its lowliness and abjection is that we are not to rank it above other Orders. Until it became your own congregation you never would have done so ; on the contrary, you used to extol and set a higher value on those great Orders of St. Benedict, and such others, so ancient, so well authorised, so pregnant with austerities, so highly spoken of and praised by the world, and which have sent so many saintly men and women to Paradise.

It must therefore be, though without your being aware of it, that the esteem in which you now hold your own Order above others proceeds from having too high an opinion of yourself. This is great pride. Without doubt, if we were conscious of it, which we have not been until now, methinks we would soon put an end to it. Our Blessed Father says the Daughters of the Visitation are called to the highest perfection that can be found here below, because the Institute leads them to the most profound humility and abasement that it is possible to practise. This virtue is its soul and life.

Let us beware of inquiring into and musing over the excellence of such humility lest we fall insensibly into the labyrinth of the most subtle and arrogant of all forms of pride. Very little speculation is needed to practise the genuine humility to which we are called, but what is requisite is a great resignation and submission of spirit.

We must firmly believe that we possess within us, in our own person and in the whole Institute, the elements of lowliness and abjection. We must frankly own to this and love it with a surpassing love. Hence we see nothing strange in people having a poor opinion of us and looking down upon us.

All who, to satisfy their vanity and complacency,

lose their time thinking over the perfection of this humility will straightway lose the virtue of humility, and having lost it they will no longer have reason for self-glorification, but rather for confusion. (*Réps. sur le Coutumier.* Art. xxiv.)

Upon one occasion St. Jane Frances altogether broke off a very important undertaking upon perceiving that it was drawing her Sisters into notice and worldly favour which was giving them influence. Speaking of it afterwards, she put her hand across her eyes as she said : " As soon as ever I saw the *éclat* of the world about it, it dazzled my eyes and I could no longer see my way." " Our way," she often repeated, " our *éclat* is to have none ; our glory is our lowliness."[1]

A Sister wrote to her a little plaintively that to become a Religious of the Visitation, she had given up an abbey and a priory, to both of which she was entitled, that she had refused the crosier St. Benedict would have given her, and from St. Francis had only received the cross. The Saint wrote back : " Esteem it happy to have found the cross ; the crosier never opened heaven to any one, the cross opens it to the whole world. In vain do you come to the Visitation if you hope to find anything but the hidden and humble life of the cross, for it is founded upon Mount Calvary."[2]

In answer to some questions about the parting counsel of St. Francis, *Ask for nothing and refuse nothing*, the Mother writes: The things we are not to ask for and not to refuse are those which are purely indifferent and which nothing but self-love makes us wish for or refuse. There is no doubt that souls who

[1] de Chaugy, *Mémoires*, p. 420.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 475.

live prepared for whatever God wishes to do with them and in them, unconcerned about everything save to abide near Him, to do and suffer faithfully whatever His providence puts at each moment in their way ; such souls, in this adopt an admirable practice. But others, who instead of being attentive to God and their duty, do nothing but think about themselves and worry between the desire of having their convenience and the fear of going against this counsel, these I advise, by all means to ask humbly and simply and as soon as possible, for what they think they require, if they have not the courage to emancipate themselves from their perplexity. This is assuredly a counsel of very high perfection. Our Blessed Father has given it to us as an abridgment of the means of attaining thereto for it is nothing short of the practice of perfect renunciation and indifference.

Each one ought to take her Superior's advice upon the difficulties she may find therein. (*Réps. sur le Coutumier*, Art. xxiv.)

Upon another day, conversing with her Daughters on this maxim, she says : The Constitution orders us to ask with confidence for what we require—but we must take care only to ask for what is necessary. She then tells her listeners that St. Francis's chief aim in giving the sisters this injunction *to ask for nothing and to refuse nothing*, was to emancipate them from that excessive care for the body which he considered such a common weakness of our sex. He knew, she says, that women are often very soft and fancy that everything hurts them, inconveniences them, injures their health. The weather gets a little cold and we want at once our warmer clothing or the heat comes and we must put it all aside before the others change. This is a sign of great tenderness and too much attention to self. It sometimes makes me somewhat sick

at heart not to see my Daughters as perfect as I would wish. A soul that is generous and attentive to God's presence has none of these little foibles. To deliver us from them was our Blessed Father's object in giving us this last counsel. (*Entr.* iii.)

Speaking to the Sisters of Nevers our Saint says : A soul abandoned completely to divine Providence desires only God and is detached from all but Him : there is no eventuality that can unsettle her, for she is God's property. Nothing, I think, so perfectly denudes the soul and gives her greater dependence on God than the practice of our Blessed Father's maxim: *Ask for nothing and refuse nothing.* He told our Sisters of Lyons that in these words everything was comprised. The last three years of his life he repeated them unceasingly to his Daughters. (*Entr.* lxxiii.)

Better, she repeats, be a child of mortification than a child of prayer. (*Entr.* lxix.) Yet would she not advise them to ask for mortifications, humiliations, worn habits and the like ; but to keep themselves in readiness should such be given them ; this, she says, is *to ask for nothing and refuse nothing.* (*Entr.* lxiv.)

During another talk with her Children one of them asks : What should we do to make a good beginning in the spiritual life ? She replies : Distrust yourselves, despise yourselves ; it is the only way of laying a good foundation. Nothing else is needed, save to have with it complete trust in God. I bethink me the reason why we see so little solid virtue is that people are not thoroughly instructed in this principle. There is so much speculation, so much account made of high ways of prayer, of transports, of things intangible, out of and beyond the common way. And yet, trust in God and distrust of self constitutes holiness and true virtue. Humility is nothing else than the

contempt and putting aside of self ; the love of one's own effacement, miseries, abjection, the gentle bearing with, nay, the wishing sweetly, gaily and amorously that we should be held and treated for what we are.

But you say : How can a soul that is very imperfect and full of miseries have this generous confidence ? Our Blessed Father was wont to say the weaker he felt the more strength and confidence he had, inasmuch as he expected nothing from himself and placed all his trust in God. He was so glad when anyone fell into faults of frailty because he held it good for humbling the soul and showing the futility of trusting to self and the value of grace, of God's help. Indeed such souls should have great courage to take in hand their perfection, without being astonished or troubled in the least on seeing they are subject to so many faults and frailties. (*Entr.* iv.)

And when they are accused of such, she tells them to receive the admonition with humility and neither excuse themselves nor in any way disavow it, nor think they are justified in exonerating themselves if they have not done the thing for which they are admonished. I should like, she continues, that we should say no more about it, unless we are asked. For we, who are to seek humiliation in everything, should be very glad when such things befall us. And if it comes into our mind to excuse ourselves and to complain that we have been wrongly accused, let us remember that Our Saviour was accused of being wicked, a drunkard, possessed of the devil and a thousand other calumnies and *He opened not his mouth.* Why are we in Religion if we will not suffer some little thing for love of Him who suffered so much for love of us ? (*Réps. 23me Constitution.*)

To whom shall I have respect but to him that is poor

and little, and of a contrite spirit and that trembleth at my words. (Isai. lxvi, 2.) *The Lord hath heard the prayer of the humble.* (Ps. ix, 17.)

These, my Sisters, are the words of Holy Scripture and I assure you if it were possible that the impossible could happen and we possessed every virtue without humility, we should not be pleasing to God. (Exh. vii, p. 134.)

If God has hidden the inestimable prize of life-eternal in self-conquest, why do we not undertake it? St. Paul says : *The word of the Cross, to them indeed that perish is foolishness : but to them that are saved, that is, to us, it is the power of God.* (1 Cor. i, 18.) The true happiness of the Christian is to know God in the person of His Son and to imitate the virtues He practised when on earth and the virtues of His Passion. He was set at nought, treated as one vile and low. He suffered poverty, abjection, contempt. For this manner of treatment nature has no predilection, but we are not born to live according to the dictates of nature. The fear of God is a precious grace ; yet he who is only thinking of pleasing God is not fearful of displeasing Him, he who has determined in his heart never wilfully to offend God, even by committing an imperfection, hardly gives hell a thought. We must humble our understanding that God may enlighten it and submit our will that He may govern it.

It matters little whether we are employed in the cellar or on the house-top, provided we are doing His will. It will not be the rank nor the employment we hold which will make us great or little in the next life, but the virtue which we practised when in these employments. Love of God, forbearance with our neighbour, meekness, modesty, recollectedness, contempt of self, affability, fidelity to the Rule, humility ;

these are what God looks to and nothing else. His eyes are not of flesh. He is not as men who are easily imposed upon by the exterior. He fathoms the heart and makes no account save of genuine inward virtues.

Our Blessed Father would not have us pretend to be ignorant of what we know, any more than capable of what we do not know. I pray you, Sisters, let us not spend our time looking out for new ways of mortifying ourselves; we shall find enough in the observance, but we must be careful to make use of them, otherwise we are not acting according to the spirit of our Institute which is a spirit of plain-dealing, of simplicity and artless communication of our little goods to our neighbour; and our Sisters are our nearest neighbours. (*Entr.* xxiv, *et Exh.* i, p. 141.)

Again, quoting from St. Paul and gathering from one passage and another the inspired words of his Epistles as they happen to come to her mind, (for we must always remember that these Conferences were chiefly given in familiar conversation during the hours of recreation) St. Jane says : St. Paul tells us that if we die with Christ in sufferings, in travail, in humiliations, we shall rise with Him in glory, in honour, in happiness. Oh, my Daughters, never forget that unless the grain of wheat, that is our heart, fall to the ground and cast its seed into the earth of religion it will be utterly brought to naught and cannot bear fruit. If we do not completely destroy the old man the new man will not live in us. (*Entr.* xxiv.)

I think Father Balthaser Alvarez acted wisely when he chose the three companions of our Lord—poverty, contempt, pain—for his particular practices of virtue.

There is nothing, you say, that touches you to the quick like any reflection upon one's honour. Ah, my Daughter, in what should a Religious, a servant of

God, place honour if not in humiliation? It is altogether unendurable to me that a Daughter of the Visitation should be too nice on the point of honour. Such a thing is monstrous. What other honour do we want than that which our Master has chosen? He has made honour consist in abjection, contempt, calumny. *What hast thou that thou hast not received, and if thou hast received why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received?* (Cor. iv, 7.) God has reserved for Himself three things: Glory, judgment, vengeance.[1]

ON SUBMISSION TO THE JUDGMENT OF SUPERIORS.

You ask, my Daughter, if a Sister thought that the Superior had not sufficient experience to lead her to the perfection to which God was calling her, thinking within herself that to attain to it mortifications were necessary in her case, and the Superior tells her they are not, what should she do? Oh, you must take great care not to give ear to such inward suggestions; they are a sign of intense pride and presumption. A Religious with such thoughts is truly to be pitied and would have vast need of being humiliated. Such a one ought unceasingly to ask Our Lord for light to know herself; for when we think we know ourselves better than our Superiors we deceive ourselves. The Superior holds the place of God and therefore we must throw aside our own judgment, for we are bound to believe that she has light to know by what way we should be guided towards perfection. My Daughter, this is a wide question, we will speak of it another time. (*Entr.* lxv.)

St. Jane Frances upon one occasion received news

[1] Vengeance belongeth to me and I will repay.—Heb. xx, 30.

of some temporal prosperity that had befallen one of the houses of our Order. That evening she said very pensively to the Sisters at recreation : " I have been all day full of fear and apprehension lest with time the Daughters of the Visitation should get a liking to be in good repute with the world. This would be to me an unutterable sorrow. I dread their falling too much into little ways of the world which would put an end to our humility and simplicity. But on the other hand I feel within me this hope, that if ever a Daughter of the Visitation is so foolhardy as to wish to make an appearance, God will humble her to the dust and bring her down to the very lowest depths. With all my heart I beseech of Him to do this. Yes, it is with my whole heart that I make this prayer.[1]

In a Conference entitled : On the Foundation of Visitandine Perfection, St. Jane says : The perfection of the Daughters of the Visitation ought to be founded on four corner-stones, else their edifice will fall : profound humility, candid simplicity, sweet meekness and condescension and the complete surrender of themselves into the arms of Providence and of their Superior. These are the effectual means of arriving at the perfection of our holy vocation.[2] (*Entr.* lxv.)

A truly humble soul seeks neither things high nor lowly but abides in holy indifference, receiving from the hand of God whatever He sends. Through the voice of obedience she learns the Divine will, for our own choice, however heavenly-minded it may appear,

[1] *Depositions of the Contemporaries of the Saint.* de Chaugy, Vol. i, 3*me partie*, p. 473, note.

[2] A religious of an Order that had fallen from its first fervour one day said to St. Francis : " My Lord, you are establishing an Order but when it shall have been as long established as ours it will be no more flourishing than this." The Saint replied : " We shall see to that. We shall make the foundations very low, and shall take care not to raise the roof too high, and thus it will not fall so easily." (*Ibid.*, note.)

is liable to deceive us. The only safe path is that of complete submission to Superiors ; it alone puts us beyond the reach of vanity which, under the appearance of humility, ofttimes feeds the good opinion we have of ourselves when we find ourselves [by our own choosing] in a lowly employment. . . . We must be in God's hands as clay in the hands of the potter, letting Him give us any form He pleases, letting Him set us at naught by humiliation, abjection, failure. Such is the crucible in which God tries the soul as gold is tried in the fire, so that, convinced of her sinfulness, she may wholly rid herself of personal esteem and seeing no good within her, while shuddering at the thought of self, she attributes to God the glory of all. To this we must come if we are to make a happy voyage and continue to experience the wondrous effects of divine mercy. The soul that keeps up a love of holy humility in the monastery, a love of lowliness and a habit of perfect submission to Superiors, will attain to great holiness, whilst filling only the most abject employments, (if indeed any employment can be such in the house of God, where to serve is to reign) for our exaltation consists in our love of humiliation. The whole perfection of our Rule is comprised in these words of the Gospel : *If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his Cross and follow Me.* . . . Our Holy Founder wished us to have complete liberty of spirit. He taught us that we must make ourselves all things to all in charity, that, if in solitude we take pleasure in God, God will take pleasure in us in the bustle of affairs, to which we should trustfully expose ourselves when, without our own choice, obedience employs us therein. (*Fragments d'Entretiens.*)

To be true Daughters of our Blessed Father only three things are needed ; the love of God, the love of

our neighbour, and the love of our own abjection. (*Ibid.*) And in St. Jane's *Answers* we read : Humility is nurtured with greater facility in the abjection and contempt of mean occupations, inasmuch as these things in themselves are abject and lead to humility. (*Réps.* 41*me. Constitution.*)

And discoursing on this virtue St. Francis says : " *To acknowledge to ourselves that we are worthless beings is only to show that we are not wanting in common-sense, but this is not humility; humility is to will, to desire that we should be held and treated as such by others* "[1]

Saint Jane giving one day a very brief Chapter begins thus :

I have only a word to say and it is to remind you that we must do violence to ourselves, put our foot on self-love and keep a sharp look-out on its vain devices on the sensualities of our body, on the temerity of our judgments, on our wanton, ungovernable wills. These are our four principal enemies ; we have to pursue them relentlessly for they never cease to pursue us. The mind of the flesh and the spirit of the world are those that do us most harm and if we are not on our guard they will insensibly drag us after them to a place where we shall not be very comfortable. Hence must we combat them unceasingly and unflinchingly. (*Exh.* ii, p. 142.)

In answer to the following question she says : You ask me what is inward despoliation ?

My Daughter, it is something of which we cannot speak plainly, at least it can hardly be understood unless God enlightens the soul. He must put a certain little candle at the bottom of the heart to show it of what it must strip itself. Now there are thou-

[1] *Oeuvres de St. F. de Sales*, t. xvi, Appendice, p. 404.

sands of things of which we must strip ourselves. There is self-interest, self-satisfaction, the consolations and feelings of God, self-esteem, our own choice; indeed those who are led by this path are perpetually putting aside their own choice in a never-ending manner. And our Lord holds them in this continual exercise, and He Himself strips them and take pleasure in seeing them in this state of denudation and powerlessness, too intangible to be able to descant thereon. (*Entr.* i.)

To possess the perfection God asks of us in our vocation we must be absolutely mortified in body, heart and mind, wholly lost to self, to all self-seeking, self-interest ; we must yield ourselves up unreservedly to His goodness and wish only what He wishes. Every tree bears fruit of its kind; if it fails it deserves to be cut down and cast into the fire. So is it with prayer ; be it high and exalted as you will, if it produce not the fruit of mortification it is worthless. To be true prayer it must needs produce fruit—the fruit of the practice of virtues, for we only mortify ourselves in order to acquire virtues, and to acquire them in perfection all that is needed is thoroughly to disentangle our hearts and give ourselves truly to God. Oh, what we lose by too much self-seeking !

My Daughters, once we enter religion our most important business is to occupy ourselves in loving God. We rob God of all the time that we do not so employ. The end of those who toil is rest, and the end of those who seek God is to rest in Him, therefore when they enjoy this rest they may truly say with the Spouse : " I have found Him whom my soul loveth : I held Him and I will not let Him go." (Cant. iii, 4.) When the soul gives herself in very deed to

mortification God renders her capable of great things. (*Entr.* xxxvi.)

Methinks I ofttimes tell you that self-love leads to the loss of everything in the spiritual life because it is productive of its own interests instead of God's interests and God's good pleasure. Human prudence does likewise much harm. So long as we entertain it the spirit of the world influences us and incapacitates us for that intimate and loving union with Our Lord which should be ours. We must work earnestly to overcome these two enemies for they are very clever and deal their blows with much subtilty ; so dexterous are they that we are frequently unaware of their manoeuvres until they have played their game.

My dear Sisters, we have not come within these walls to live according to nature. We must overcome it with generosity and instead of following self-love and the human spirit, live by a holy strength of mind, according to the lights of grace and of reason. Fidelity to these two lights suffices to lead a soul to the highest perfection of divine love. Cordially and affectionately I ask you, each and all, to take to heart what I say, for, I bethink me, God has not given me this light to no purpose, nor without willing that we should profit by it. Let us do so then, I beg of you. (*Exh.* iii, p. 144.)

Speaking on the manner of following the Saviour the Saint says : If we find our limbs stiff in walking after Our Saviour, let us not lose heart but with resolute courage say to Him : *Lord draw me and I shall run* (Cant. 1, 4.) for if Thou wilt have me run Thou must needs draw me. Then seeing our determination to walk faithfully in the way of His will, no need to

doubt but that He will make us run lovingly after His perfumes and that the road will be attractive, sweet, delightful.

If we could but once make up our mind to offer to God the myrrh of complete mortification and annihilation of self, He, in His goodness, would make our path so alluring that, drawn by His divine fragrance we would run after Him without pain, or, at least, with only such pain as would be lovable and would end in resting tranquilly upon the Saviour's breast. But, my dear Sisters, we must not presume to such a place of rest save by the way of mortification and renunciation of self, for were we to think that we could take hold of the Saviour without letting go of self we should be deceiving ourselves. . . . (*Exh.* vii, p. 152.)

Again referring to the detrimental inroads of self-love, St. Jane says :

Some souls are so full of themselves that it is manifest in their work, their words, their way of acting, in everything they do. But others are more subtle, they dissimulate, and yet, for all that, when I speak to them, I can see self-love dancing within them. Ah, but we must be very diligent in striving by complete abnegation and mortification to drive out self.

You ask if a soul cannot be very full of herself without knowing it ? Yes, that is quite possible.

Then the Saint advises the study of the Conferences of St. Francis and tells them that if they penetrated into the science of self-effacement there taught they would be braver women than they are. You are all good, she says, you keep silence, say the office with care and make no replies to obedience ; but what about inward trials—the real touchstone ? Upon this a Sister remarks that when one conquers oneself or performs some good action there comes a certain

complacency and satisfaction which spoils all if we are not on our guard. Quite true, dearest Sisters, and what a misfortune it is ! But all is not lost when having made some genuine sacrifice we experience a feeling of self-satisfaction. If we can never or rarely do good without some such complacency resulting, that is not evil : to entertain ourselves with it, to take pleasure in it, there is the evil, that is what spoils all. Now, in this case what should we do ? We must crush the vain thoughts, humble ourselves, give the glory to God and recognise that of ourselves we can do nothing. We are not half enough in love with our own humiliation.

There are souls many a year in Religion who do not know what it is to have peace because they do not labour to acquire absolute renunciation of their own feelings and sentiments. They have been told over and over again how to procure peace, and instead of doing as they are told and bearing their cross meekly and patiently (for this state is a cross) they are always looking for fresh advice, trying in this way to satisfy their own will and inclinations and by their disobedience they deprive themselves of the joys of tranquillity. We must, by inward fervour, vivify our outward actions and in this way keep up our courage to face the troubles and travail consequent on seeking perfection. Not, indeed, that we should seek it because it is a good thing, nor for the good resulting to us from it, but because by so doing we please God. We have not come here to feel fervent, to have greater means of doing good, nor simply to avoid the occasions of sin, but to labour to acquire profound humility, submission, mortification, self-renunciation, to please God and do all things for the love of Him. This is what we have come for and we must not stop short at the outer rind. (*Entr.* viii.)

Those who speak so fluently on spiritual things must take good heed that their works conform to their words, otherwise it is pride.

It is very possible that God may leave us in our weaknesses and we may consequently take it into our heads that we cannot humble ourselves : but I must lay bare this subtilty of self-love which is glad enough to say and believe that God is exercising us. One will say to me, " I am subject to " or " I am greatly tried by such troubles but I suffer them as an exercise which God sends me." To such persons I answer quietly, " God has not thought about it." This brings them to a sense of confusion and they know not what to say in reply.

And later, in the same Conference, again replying to a question she answers : Yes, you may make a genuflection on entering your cell, but I would rather that we made a good practice of annihilating our affections, feelings, inclinations. (*Entr.* ix.)

Upon another occasion, coming into the assembly room, our Saint tells the Sisters she has been unexpectedly ordered off by His Majesty [Our Lord] and must be starting on her journey. However, she says, there is nothing to add to what we were talking about on Sunday save this one word : *We only need to do well what we do.* So I beg of you to reduce to practice the good movements, inspirations and lights God gives you. Then, apparently forgetful of the time and warming into her subject, she gives them four other causes or roots from whence spring all our ills. And to these four, she says, are opposed four principles that are the source of all our happiness.

The first is that we have not sufficient knowledge of the greatness and the excellence of the religious state, nor of the nature of the real and solid virtues

practised therein—genuine humility, true patience, and the like—a state of ignorance that gives birth to other ills. Now, mark you, we see the antithesis to this in the soul who gives herself up to reading, meditation and other ways of enlightenment. Such a one learns the real greatness of religious life, and advances beyond the rest because she gets the better of that ignorance which is the source of evil, and acquires that knowledge which is the first step towards the good things the religious state offers her.

The second source of evil is that we do not place adequate reliance on, nor revere, as is our duty, the Rules, observances and customs of religion. They are all holy and have been established by the Spirit of God with so much wisdom that we should honour them and, if we may so speak, in a manner worship them. Be jealous of every practice of religion, such as accusing yourself in Chapter, receiving humiliations in the refectory, being gentle and cordial in action. These practices greatly enhance merit and we ought never to let such occasions slip by without a certain regret accruing from the esteem in which we hold them. Like the miser who cannot see a penny without picking it up, so ought we to have a holy avarice, or rather should I say a holy ambition, to enrich ourselves with these good things and lose no occasion of adding to our store.

The third cause of evil to us is that we have not the genuine desire which the perfection of our state requires of us. We have, it may be, some slight wish, faint-hearted, cold and of little fruit. The antithesis to this velleity is a desire that is true, ardent, efficacious. Of a surety there is not one among us who if she was resolved to get the better of a certain passion or habit, however inveterate it might be, would not gain some victory in a few weeks, or at

most, in a few months. You know the answer St. Thomas gave his sister when she asked him a way of becoming perfect. ' "By willing it," he replied. This is all we want, a true desire, and I assure you you will soon reach perfection.

The fourth and last cause of our misery is defective courage. Many have a wish for and speak remarkably well on the practice of virtue, but lose heart at the first difficulty that presents itself. Others again acknowledge the happiness of religious life, have a great desire of virtue but one quality is lacking: strong courage to resist their temptations and to support the contradictions met with therein. The fortitude and generosity required for overcoming difficulties, which owing to the weakness of our nature are inevitable, holds at arm's length such pusillanimity of spirit. A generous soul does not hold parley with herself about her little miseries. She has higher aims, she aspires to the perfection of her vocation. Now this does not consist in performing a ceremony well, in singing in choir ; such things do not make a Religious. What does constitute a Religious is the practice of the true and sterling virtues demanded by his or her state. Oh, my Sisters, recognise and be grateful for the excellence, the dignity, the happiness of Religion, esteem and prize it far above what the world makes account of. Let your desire for perfection be genuine and, finally, be resolute in carrying it into effect and in overcoming all obstacles. (*Entr.* ii.)

Once again our Saint repeats what she had said in the foregoing Conference and accentuates it by quoting St. Francis who, she tells her Daughters, used to say *I know no other way of doing good than* TO DO GOOD *that is to practice virtue* ; there is no other secret to perfection. You want to be humble, then practice

humility ; to die to self, then bravely mortify your passions and your own will. We work hard, you say, and we do not attain perfection. How long, think you, must you toil ? Till the very end. Oh, but it is well spent labour so it would be grievous of us to grudge or spare the travail. Let us aim at complete death to self. . . . The will of God is clearly signified to us by our Rules and by our Superiors, so there is no difficulty in knowing it, but the trouble is that we refuse to recognise it when it is not clothed in the livery in which we should like to see it. (*Entr.* x.)

Giving Chapter on the last Saturday of the year 1629 our Saint says :

The year comes to an end—time passes—we ought not to let years, months, even days, succeed each other without deep reflection on the transitoriness, the passing into oblivion of all that is not God, our Spouse, to whom we ought solely to attach ourselves. Nothing of all we possess, do, say in this world will remain to us save two things, the good and the evil we have done. I would, Sisters, that you should try to fathom these thoughts and fill your hearts with their perfume. It would not be, in my opinion, without utility. (*Exh.* vi, p. 177.)

On the humiliations of the Eternal Word in His coming down to earth, the Saint says :

Ah, my dear Sisters, I implore of you by this example [the humiliations of the Eternal Word] take strength and courage never to flag in your efforts until you have (so to say) exterminated self. Would that we might by such a conquest give pleasure to Him who has so annihilated Himself for us. For, we must all die, not only to the desire of being honoured, esteemed, loved, caressed, but we must go further and extinguish all superfluous desires for our perfection, which might make us think more of the means of

acquiring it than of keeping close to God. We must relinquish our love of honour after the example of Our Lord, that nothing may appear in us save what is abject, poor, faulty, blundering. So shall we keep despicable, very despicable in our own eyes, very small in our own esteem.

Our good God had to exercise a continual miracle in order to hold back what was beautiful and good in Him who is beauty itself, the essence of all beauty and goodness, and this He did to identify Himself with our human miseries. But, for us, we have simply to let our wretchedness and misery be seen without in any way striving to hide it, and this will be quite enough to keep us lowly and abject, not only in our own eyes but in those of others.

I do not mean to say that we should for fear of honour and esteem refrain from good works, to which our Rule and our vocation oblige us. Oh, no, that is not the humility God requires of us, but rather the bringing down of all our inclinations, for our nature is ordinarily so corrupt that it has to be well humbled to adjust it to the exact observance of Rule and reason. So, when I say we must exterminate self after the example of Our good Lord and Master, I mean only in things of nature, for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

Let us, I beg of you, during these remaining days before the great day of Christmas, employ ourselves in considering faithfully the abjection of this great God, to imitate it according to our poor capacity. But above all let us eradicate the desire of being loved, esteemed, preferred. In fact, we should eradicate all that the divine Goodness will show us not to be conformable to Him, and to His good pleasure. (*Exh.* iii, p. 169.)

Mother, asks a Sister, Our Blessed Father once told

me that we must be continually lowering ourselves by humility and raising ourselves by love. How are we to understand this ?

My dear Daughter, humility is the foundation and charity the summit of perfection, so that as we lower ourselves by humility we increase in love and ennoble ourselves thereby. How well our Blessed Father practised this ! He kept his mind so untrammelled, so emancipated from all desires, affections, designs, pretension that he never interferred with anything save what concerned his charge. Oh ! How I wish we could imitate him in this. Let each one do what obedience orders without thinking of or meddling with other matters. There are minds who wish to direct and arrange everything, they cause worry and disorder, they bore the House and this affects not only the outward but the inward life ; whereas indifference, non-interference leaves the mind unoccupied, denuded, detached,and consequently free to be filled with God and to apply itself to live for Him. It is, my Sisters, by this wholesale renunciation of self to God, burying every interest and aim in the good pleasure of His adorable Providence, that we are able under His guidance to lift ourselves up by love, with no longer any preference for one thing rather than another. By such annihilation let us rise to God with the sweet thought of His glorious Eternity which He has destined for those who give up something for love of Him. But, Daughters, it is no light matter to kill these inclinations of ours. (*Entr.* xxiii.)

(Later on, as we shall see, our Saint says it is impossible utterly to extinguish our passions.)

With that long-suffering patience which made her so accessible to her spiritual children, the Mother says :

I tell you over and over again, thousands of times

every year, and now I say it once more. We must labour with steadfast purpose to attain that high virtue which God wills for us. We have noble sentiments of love for Him, we have admirable desires to make good resolutions, but when it comes to the time of action we play the child and show neither constancy nor courage. Oh, how I long to see us high-souled women, faithful—disregarding our petty susceptibilities and doing everything for God, be it sweet or bitter, easy or difficult.

A Sister here asks a question which St. Jane thus repeats in her reply : No, my Daughter, it is not failing in magnanimity, or rather in solidity of virtue, to feel repugnances, rebellion, contradictions, provided we yield no concession and disavow them. For here below the flesh will always struggle with the spirit, human with divine prudence, pride against humility, the lower man against the higher. Such combats, temptations, trials are provided for us to enable us to put a nail into the solidity of the contrary virtue. We must ask our great Father, St. Augustine, to obtain for us the veritable treasure of true humility. This virtue made him greater in heaven than all his eminent doctrine, than all his other virtues.

Glory be to God and to His great servant Augustine. (*Entr.* xvii.)

On the closing day of their annual Retreat some Sisters who were making it at the same time as St. Chantal asked her to give them the " watchword." She replied that she had already been several times thinking of what she should give them and the word that always came to her mind was " FIDELITY." That is, she says, a real, grand fidelity, not a feeble, but a LOYAL FIDELITY to our resolutions for they are easier to make than to keep. Let them be written on the parchment of our hearts. Let us recall them to mind

two or three times a day, for we must battle and get the mastery over ourselves.

Holding a Conference upon this same day, she says : What matters it ! You may be the most faulty and miserable soul in the world, yet if you love your abjection, the humility of it atones for everything. But alas ! most frequently we aspire to great sentiments, to have this or that. We want high things but God does not want us to have them. He permits us certain temptations and His will is that we should therein love our own abjection. (*Entr.* lii.)

And on the vital necessity of mortification for those who aspire to perfection and the joys to be found therein, St. Jane Frances says : Our Blessed Father used to say that the measure of God's Providence over us is the measure of our confidence in Him. And I, I tell you the measure of our perfection is the measure of our mortification. The degree of earnestness which we put into our efforts to subdue and overcome nature is the degree of our love of God. How prodigal is He in His blessings to us and how paltry, in our cowardice, is our return. (*Ex.* xiv, p. 197.)

Kindling the desire of her Children, the Mother thus pictures to them the effects of virtue : The human spirit, seeing a man deserted, persecuted, mortified, looks upon him as miserable and would willingly weep with compassion for him because he is cast off by creatures. Did it but know and understand the sweetness that man finds in humiliations it would envy the happiness he enjoys in being admitted into the intimacies of Divine friendship. God permits the faithlessness of creatures ; it is a signal favour of divine Providence, because our poor human heart is so feeble that were it always to meet with satisfaction in them it would find difficulty in going to the Creator. When pain and contempt and abnegation come upon

us, let us then never say, ENOUGH, LORD; but rather, BEHOLD ME READY. This manner of acting is to to live after the Spirit and not after that of the inferior man who has no share in this perfect action. Herein is the way in which we should walk . . . Our Blessed Father said to me one day " This utter self-renouncement is the rendezvous of our heart and we ought to have none other." (*Entr.* xli.)

In the following, her last adieu to the Sisters of the first Monastery of Paris, St. Jane reiterates the same thought :

When we lose the love of mortification and of contempt we lose our spirit and frustrate God's design over us from all Eternity. Let us then, I entreat you, respond to grace nor defeat the work which God has inspired our dear Founder to make known to us. We are bound by a peculiar obligation to form ourselves according to the spirit of our calling and to be conspicuous for those virtues for which our Founder was conspicuous, and which are so dear to Our Saviour. We should never be so joyful as when men despise us, speak ill and make no account of us. There is no need to seek for occasions of contempt, but when we meet them we must accept them with joy and be more jealous of our spirit and of our perfection than a loving husband is of a beautiful wife. When the world despises you, be not satisfied with accepting this contempt as a pledge of God's love and goodness but receive it likewise as most fitting and suitable to your insignificant position, your mean estate. Cherish it as something to be prized for your individual self and for your whole Order.

When you feel repugnances and contradictions in your path be not surprised, for virtue is exercised by means of what is antagonistic to our proud and overweening nature. Yes, the humility, the submission

and compliance that is practised against the grain is the most strenuous and the best. A single action performed in this spirit is worth heaven ten times over. Nay, what am I saying? It is worth more; it is worth the God of heaven. Be valiant then, Sisters, in the services of God and bear one another's burdens.

The Saint ends this exhortation by a peroration instinct with humility, in which she appeals to her children to glorify God by their humility, self-effacement, and lowly condition, for such she tells them, is His will for the Daughters of the Visitation and these are the virtues through which He has destined them to glorify Him. Then, begging of all present to intercede with God for her, asking their pardon and commending them to the keeping of Our Lord and His Blessed Mother, she prays God to make them lovers of contempt and faithful to their Rule. (*Exh.* ix, pp. 157-60.)

During one of St. Jane Frances's instructions in the noviciate a novice asks: Mother, must we seek occasions of humiliation? No, my Daughter, the Saint replies, that is not our spirit, but when occasions present themselves we should receive them well, and when none come our way we must make inward acts, saying to ourselves that we are nothing but meanness and misery and annihilate ourselves before God. The novice continues: When I am looked down upon or humbled I feel it to the quick, although I have the will to love it, Mother; is this will good? O Jesu! yes, my Daughter, this is what our Blessed Father so instilled into us. He taught that all repugnances and feelings can do us no harm, provided that we do not follow them, and cheerfully accept [with our will] the contempt they bring upon us, believing that we really deserve it; these are true acts of virtue. (*Instructions*, v., p. 825.)

Many times in her conversations and her Chapters

St. Jane Frances emphasises the above instructions : that to acquire the perfection of the spirit of the Institute no opportunity that presents itself of practising humility should be lost, while not going out of one's way in search of humiliations. However, in one instruction she says : I used to notice towards the end of our Blessed Father's life how he seemed daily to become more attentive to the purification of his soul by cutting off everything that was not of God or for God. All the greater reason then that beginners and the imperfect, who are still very immortified, should turn to good account the occasions they meet with to practise mortification and the other virtues ; nay, they must do more, they must seek the occasions and that lovingly yet without constraint or fettering too much the holy freedom of spirit which ought to go hand in hand with all our actions. (*Réps. sur la Const. de l'Obéissance*, p. 135.)

And again :

The perfection of our Order, my dear Sisters, is not founded on high and exceptional graces in prayer, but on solid virtue. Our first Mothers and Sisters would have never wished to speak of anything save prayer. They were perpetually putting questions to our Blessed Father about it, and they were not over-well satisfied because he answered them curtly and enlarged on the practice of genuine virtue by which he always led those he guided more than by any other way. Even if he saw souls favoured with the most sublime transports and found in them no foundation of true humility he made no account of it. The way that leads to life is narrow. To walk steadily therein we must act, suffer, bear, since we are in this valley of tears only to be weary and endure, to suffer and not to enjoy, to fight and not to rest. The Church of God, the Spouse of Jesus Christ, is called militant, fighting, combatant. All

the faithful are members of this Church ; these faithful members must needs be all fighting soldiers, strong and valiant, to conquer the three enemies common to all. Now of these three enemies the first two, the devil and the world, give us no great trouble. The third, *ourselves*, is our chief tormentor, our great opponent, and the one on which the two others rely, for they know that man's fiercest enemy is himself.—If we are not watchful to mortify it [the body] however holy we may be, we shall take steps in the wrong direction because of certain rebellious and contradictory feelings in the inferior part. Of a truth, I know of no saint who needed not to attend to the mortification of his body. It always seems to me that there is something very despicable in being attached to our bodies, we who enjoy the sweetest and purest pleasures in the spirit, and are called to live a life that is wholly spiritual. Let us bring the body under subjection to reason, and not reason to the body. In this undertaking we must put all our trust in the Divine Goodness who upholds us, and no reliance whatsoever on our own strength. (*Entr.* xxxix.)

Our Saint, drawing attention to these two phrases in the Constitution on Humility which she considers the most essential : *profound humility and humility which consists not so much in gesture, words, and looks as in deed and in truth*, comes at once, with her eminently practical mind, to the root of the matter. She says : Let us not talk, Sisters, so much about humility nor occupy ourselves so much in desiring it, but come to the practice of it ; it is a virtue that requires deeds not words. You want to be humble ? Then try to know yourselves as you really are. Love contempt, howsoever and from whatever quarter it comes to you. Do not try to hide your faults, let them be known ; cherish the abjection that comes of them. No matter

what faults you commit, do not despond. With no confidence in self, rely wholly upon God, fully persuaded that while you can do nothing of yourself, with the power of His grace there is nothing you cannot do. When you are humbled, neglected, employed in mean and painful occupations, do not imagine that it is to prove your virtue but make your heart confess that you are yet far from getting your deserts. These are, in my opinion, marks of a humble spirit and when you have given yourself to such practices you may say, my Daughter, that you are beginning to love humility. Would you know if a soul is humble? See if she is sincere in laying bare her imperfections in good faith without colouring or windings. A Sister who joyfully loves her abjection and cheerfully accepts admonitions and correction is, you may conclude, truly humble.

When I say that we must love contempt, corrections, rebuffs, abjection, I mean in the higher part of the spirit—in spite of our repugnances and difficulties, for it would be hardly possible to love with a sensible feeling things so contrary to our inferior nature. This grace God only bestows on certain souls upon whom He wishes to confer a supreme favour or to recompense for their fidelity, but it is in no way necessary.

You ask if the humble soul is not sometimes tempted to pride and thoughts of vanity? Yes, my dear Sister, she may have temptations to pride, but her works are not the works of pride, these temptations only serve to make it easier for her to annihilate herself before God and to cast herself with the greater facility upon Him as she sinks the deeper into a sense of her own unworthiness. Such humility is a great virtue. It is the virtue of all others that gives delight to the Heart of Jesus and to our divine Mistress, His most glorious Mother.

All Holy Scripture is filled with panegyrics of the humble. Our Lady's Canticle is nothing but a eulogy of this admirable virtue. David says : *the Lord is the protector of the humble.* His heart is drawn to us, His look turned upon us if we are humble. But this humility must be inward rather than outward, for it is such Our Lord tells us to learn of Him. *Learn of me because I am meek and humble of heart.*[1] Oh, Sisters, what a rare thing is a truly humble heart. The place of its own finding is always lower than the level to which another can reduce it. Take my word for it, my dear Daughters, when we possess a grain of true humility we possess a treasure, a coin wherewith to purchase heaven and the heart of God. (*Entr.* xix.)

Speaking on Spiritual Valour, the Saint tells us the Church Militant and the Church Triumphant are two sisters who have an exceeding great love for one another, and while the Militant fights, the Triumphant prays for her. Who conquers in the Militant shall enjoy in the Triumphant, for we must fight to conquer and conquer to enjoy. I am not called upon to do battle with the infidel; it is not my vocation. I am not obliged to fight others but I am obliged to fight against myself, my own imperfections. So long as we are in this life we shall have to combat, one more, one less. Beginners have more to fight against than those well on their way, and these latter while making way have more to do than those who are in a higher stage of perfection ; but all have to toil. This life is given us to labour, to make progress towards perfection, to travail at our mortification.

We are called to a perfection all the more excellent as it is more inward, for in truth it is nothing less than the total death of nature, of the old man, solidly to establish within us the kingdom of grace.

[1] Matt. xi, 29.

St. Jane then tells them they must work out their salvation and perfection in fear, but it must be a trustful, filial fear and we must love God purely for Himself. For if we love God as *our* sovereign good there is still something of self. We must love Him as *the* sovereign good without regarding that He is *ours*. This is the perfection of pure love to which we should aspire.

The soul who is desirous that God should live in her, leaves nothing in herself that might be displeasing in His divine eyes ; nothing that she does not mortify as she advances on her way ; for being urged by desire she does violence to herself in such good earnest as to die happily to self that God may live in her. Souls that really love God have no tenderness about their own flesh. Believe me, they resolutely cut off all vain satisfactions of nature, for, being in love with God, they chafe at anything that thwarts their passion for Him.

St. Jane then warns her hearers to admit no one to profession who is indolent and spiritually slothful, for she will come to no good. She prefers, she says, a hot-headed and impetuous character, for with such a one it all comes out and there is something to build upon ; but the other seems outwardly to walk, yet in reality does not budge. God protect us from such spirits for they are more dangerous than I can say. (*Entr.* xxi.)

To this question whether the passions can be completely annihilated our Saint now gives the following lucid reply :

No, Daughter, it is impossible completely to kill our passions ; we can, indeed, deaden them, yet we shall still feel them. By virtue of mortification they will cease to make war on us, but, because they are not dead, they will become suddenly wide awake again when we least expect it and make us fall into serious

faults. Many persons by a long habit of self-denial gain a certain ascendency over them and as soon as they begin to revolt they have the power to hold them back.

Souls whose passions are at rest because nothing crosses them cannot be called virtuous, such virtue is only apparent and has no existence save in their imagination.

You ask if the devil can give us passions ? No, Sister. Our passions are our own, they are natural to us but, if God gives him permission he can rouse them. (*Entr.* vi.)

We usually give ourselves our troubles. I see few temptations of the devil among us and nevertheless all is put down to him, but there is much self-love and self-seeking. The temptations of the devil are very grievous yet those of our self-love are more hurtful and more dangerous on account of their subtilty. (*Entr.* ix.)

What is to be done, you ask, when all at once, we feel our passions revolt ?

Do not force yourself to make a number of acts in order to conquer them because they might get the better of you, but, in the highest part of your soul simply unite your will to God's will, humble yourself and from that moment keep close to God with what tranquillity you can command. In fact we must do as the threshers did to-day when carrying our wheat across the lake. In an instant a violent storm arose and they found themselves in imminent peril. Had they obstinately set themselves to make head against the great waves, the boat and all in it would certainly have been submerged ; but they followed the little waves and very skilfully brought their barque to shore. In this way they landed, not by battling with the storm but by avoiding it. Now, this is what we must do, we

must not think to be able of ourselves to calm the storm within us, but gently draw near the shore, keeping our will firmly in God, and coast along the little waves to reach Him, by humble knowledge of ourselves. He is our sure port and by so doing we shall reach Him with more glory than if we had enjoyed a perfect calm and had impelled our barque without difficulty. Are you satisfied with these answers to your questions, my Daughters? I hope so, and that God will give us the grace to profit by everything. (*Entr.* vi.)

A Sister asks: What is inward tranquillity? I hardly know myself, the Saint replies, but I think it is the inward mortification of all our passions and motions, so that all may be brought under the empire of reason. To my thinking there is nothing so tranquil as a soul whose passions are appeased and brought into subjection to our higher nature. When the passions are all alive and unmortified they make a great uproar, a terrible noise, and with noise and tumult there cannot be tranquillity. Hence, we must, by strenuously mortifying them, endeavour to acquire this virtue so profitable, so desirable. Our Institute which is wholly founded on the inward life makes tranquillity one of its principal virtues.

Turning to a Sister who addressed her, St. Jane repeats her question. You say that you have many good desires on this point but you are so weak that the inferior nature gets the better of the higher and drags everything after it. My dear Sister, this is no valid excuse because, by the grace of God which never fails us, we can avoid evil and do good. Why did we come into religion if not to overcome nature? This is not loyal adherence to our first intentions which were to live above ourselves and only for God and our neighbour. Make no account of such little sillinesses

as desiring to be preferred, loved, esteemed, humoured and to have our wishes understood. All this should be scorned as unworthy of a heart on which God bestows His grace ; of a soul called to His service, to so noble a vocation. We are obliged to aspire, to stretch out towards eminent perfection, for this we must toil. Sisters, you are certainly good but you must become better.

You want me to speak freely to you ? Well, we are somewhat too earthly, too tender, especially when self is concerned ; we still wish somewhat too much what we wish, and fail to lift up our minds and hearts, as we might do, towards the things of heaven. Ah, Sisters, what is this life of which we make so much account ? Upon what are our thoughts running ? Upon love, esteem, consideration. Upon whether we are employed in this or that, whether or no we are slighted and whether we are treated like the rest in something we are given to do ? What troubles us ? What makes us uneasy ? That we have committed a fault, especially if it has been noticed by others. And if we are thwarted, if we are put out, we make a thousand reflections, in all of which we are ourselves the centre. Whereas, what we have been taught to do is, profoundly and lovingly to humble ourselves in God's sight and then straightway rise generously and go forward on our way. So long as we live we shall commit faults ; the best we can do is to commit as few as possible. The Mother then goes on to say that faults committed voluntarily and in complete carelessness can be avoided by the grace of God, and if we do not give our consent hell itself cannot make us commit them.

In examining our conscience, if our heart feels bitter against anyone, we must look to our will. Have we the will to hurt them ? For bitterness is not a sin

in itself, even though I may feel my heart boiling over with anger. If in spite of that I make an act of virtue in regard to that person, or if I am glad of some ill-luck to him, or sorry for some good that has come to him and that I make an act contrary to my feelings I should remain in peace.

But I know very well from whence these bitternesses come. We have no true desire to lay up in our hearts the love of contempt and of dishonour, and so the least humiliating word irritates us, which it would fail to do if we loved contempt. We are vain and proud ; if on the contrary we were upright, sincere, virtue-loving, involuntary faults would do us no harm provided we humble ourselves for them, for we commit them without reflection. (*Entr.* li.)

To live according to our passions and inclinations is to live as a beast, to live according to human wisdom is to live as a philosopher, but to live according to the maxims of the Gospel, in the spirit of humility and mortification, as all the saints have done, is to live for God. We must get at the root of all these little inclinations of our natural man and destroy them ; their only value is to be the occasion of exercising us in mortification. The best penance that religious souls can do is to break and renounce their will. Acquire what virtues you will, unless you preserve them by actual practice they will perish. (*Entr.* xxvi.)

In answer to another question St. Jane says :

Yes, God gives greater graces, just as He gives greater occasions for His assistance, to some than to others, but to all He gives sufficient grace to carry out what He wills, yet, to this sufficient grace we do not all equally correspond. Mortification without the presence of God is nothing but presumption,

in as much as we need particular help from God to mortify ourselves and we cannot find this in any better way than by keeping ourselves in His holy presence.

Never forget the proverb : *No good without trouble.* The dread of this trouble is the cause of all our ill. No one can learn an art however mechanical without toil ; neither can we learn the art of virtue without sufferings and painstaking, without continual war against ourselves. I am not astonished at weariness, jealousies, natural inclinations, still all these things must be brought under the dominion of reason and of God's good pleasure. We prize what we ought to despise and if we do not get what we want we are upset, disturbed, melancholy—all is over with us. This excessive tenderness as to mind and body is the great defect of women. Superiors are obliged to encourage such souls to rise above themselves. The charge of Superior is an onerous one because she has not only to render an account for herself to God but also for her Sisters if, by any fault of hers, they do not duly advance to perfection. (*Entr.* xxv.)

And again :

It is a terrible thing for a religious soul to love her reputation, to dread being deprived of the least shadow of it. She should keep herself in absolute indifference to whatever may be the will of God for her. In this consists the essence of humility. The humbler we are the holier we are, and no more—to the humble-minded God imparts privileged lights and favours. If a man does not mortify himself and do violence to himself he will never bring forth the fruit God wills Him to bring forth.

The love of our own esteem is a helmet, a breast-plate, rendering the soul impervious to the darts of God's love. My desire is that you should all be

SAINTS but SAINTS of the purest purity, of most profound humility. (*Entr.* xl.)

The following words give comfort and strength :

We must not get over-anxious in trying to make our lower nature rise to the soul's resolve of belonging wholly to God, and of serving Him as willingly in affliction and in sorrow as in health and consolation. For nature is coarse and material and it has no appetite for such delicate food. It is enough if the conformity which we feel to the will of God and His good pleasure is in the higher part.

The Saint then recommends a practice of which she says St. Francis himself frequently made use, and which he highly recommended as a means of engraving on the heart the love of solid virtue. You should, she says, frequently represent to your mind painful and difficult things that you might be called upon to accept ; as for instance : if obedience commanded you to go four hundred leagues away from your Mother, if you should be slandered, accused of some grave matter, our Institute defamed, you yourselves overwhelmed by inward sorrows and grievous oppression of heart, by labour, by extreme poverty and such like, what should you do ? You should make a firm resolution to be faithful to God and fix it in the deepest depths of your hearts, for our Blessed Father used to say : *The only thing we should gather from every eventuality we experience is the dew of the divine good pleasure.*

God has placed in the hands of our fidelity the perfection of our souls, and there is but one way of attaining to it : by the complete mortification of our nature and of this it is the product. . . . Love will have works and whatsoever ends in wishes alone is false and counterfeit.

The best and the greatest practice of mortification that it is possible to make in the spiritual life is to bear with ourselves when, at times, our poor soul feels its weakness and powerlessness of will to do what is right. (*Entr.* xxvi.)

In speaking on the last day of the year of the advantages of inward and outward renunciation our Saint says, alluding to the change of cells, rosaries, etc[1] and employments :

It is no great matter, it seems to me, to be a little attached to these things. But to be attached to our own will, judgment, esteem, our inward satisfactions, to wish to be loved. Ah ! Here is the danger, this it is that is hurtful to our advancement, and how much harder it is to discover and uproot.

Then St. Jane gives the Sisters two practices of renunciation, and she says : Only two, so as not to overburden their minds. These are humility and meekness, by means of which they are to renounce vanity and self-esteem. She continues : We have too good an opinion of self. Let us learn to know ourselves and to hold ourselves simply for what we are. Otherwise, our affairs will not go well and we shall be unable to acquire the spirit of the Institute. Meekness, according to our Blessed Father, enables us to strip ourselves of our passions and inclinations, to become gracious towards our neighbour and tranquil in ourselves. Whatever may befall us if we are meek we do not fret about our imperfections nor give way to dryness and hardness of heart. If our Holy Founder had not made this virtue the subject of one of his conferences I would speak of it much more fully, so great is my desire to see it reign among us. (*Entr.* lxiii.)

[1] It is the custom at the Visitation to give up on December 31st all that one has had the use of during the year and to draw by lot for the next year

And again :

Meekness of heart means to resent nothing, never to take offence, to be full of compassion and of love for our neighbour, to entertain no bitterness of heart. I do not mean by this the heart of flesh but the heart of the will, the higher part of the soul. The keen edge of persecution, misfortune, contradiction, is blunted as it comes in contact with the meek of heart. Our Holy Founder told me that he was insensible to all the contempt, blame and abusive language which his actions drew upon him. To bear such things meekly is to make true acts of humility. If it is said in the Rule that the Superior should keep herself under the feet of all ; much more should the Sisters keep themselves at the feet of one another. Submission is the touchstone by which we recognise whether or no humility and holiness are genuine. (*Entr.* xxviii.)

On the humility that is exercised in the virtue of Faith she says :

I have always had this light : that the glory of our understanding lies in its being taken captive by and made subject to the obscure things of faith which surpass the senses and intelligence of man ; such as the adorable Trinity, the Incarnation, the august Sacrament of our Altars and the Resurrection. Today I was looking for a long time at a bee that was gathering honey from a flower. I have never been able to understand how after having extracted it by its little mouth it got it on to its legs to carry it to the hive, and I said to myself : What miserable creatures we are, we cannot understand what these little creatures do and how can we attempt to understand what God does ? It seems to me (glory be to the Author of all good for it) that when I know that God

or the Church has said a thing I believe it better than I believe I have two eyes in my head. (*Fragments d'Entrs.*)

In the year 1632 several Sisters at Annecy made their annual Retreat with St. Jane Frances, and one of them deposed to the following :

" This holy soul spoke of mortification, of lowliness, of contempt of this life, of desire to possess the happiness of eternity."

The following are a few of her most pregnant remarks :

I cannot relish the method of those who wish only to speak and think of high and sublime things. The more I enter into the spiritual life the more God gives me to understand that the whole good of the soul lies in effacing and destroying self and letting God reign peacefully within her. Superiors who only speak to their Daughters of high things have, I should say, no great number of mortified ones who are dead to self and submissive in everything that is desired of them. Believe me, Sisters, the way that leads to life is narrow. Religious must be taught to bring this home to themselves so that they may embrace strict mortification, and not sublimity of thought, which, unaccompanied by profound humility, obedience, modesty, truth, uprightness, contempt of self, tends to inflame pride and breeds nothing but vanity. (*Ibid.*)

In answer to another query St. Jane says :

Mortification extends to the taming of the passions and keeping them under the dominion of reason, to the renunciation of the affections of the heart and of all our inclinations, to cutting short a variety of reflections, and saying in imitation of Our Lord : *I am not come to do my own will but the will of Him that sent me.*[1] In a word; the faithful practice of our

[1] John vi, 38.

Rules and Constitutions is a good mortification. (*Entr.* xliv.)

In prayer we take pleasure in God, but in mortification God takes pleasure in us. Be little, my dearest Daughters, love to be unknown and abject. Be obedient, meek and condescending. Let no slackness of yours put obstacles to the design of God for your high sanctification. Bear in mind that when God established you He claimed to have very humble and very lowly Daughters in His Church. (*Entr.* lxxii.)

Amid all this severe training in mortification it is pleasant to regard St. Jane under another aspect, to see how careful she was not to lay upon her Daughters any penance, however passing, that might be injurious to weak health or fragile shoulders. Mother de Chaugy tells us that in one Monastery a Sister had been given an obedience to drink only water at her meals for some days. Our Saint, knowing her delicacy and fearing her digestion might suffer, obtained permission to mitigate the penance and secretly put white wine into her water-bottle, so that the Sisters who had seen her fault might not perceive that her penance had been dispensed.

She writes to a newly-elected Superior: Your office is that of a mother of a family. . . . You will find that your Sisters will not all make the same flight towards perfection. Some will soar very high, others will fly low, others again, will take a middle course; serve each according to her capacity. . . . There are certain good but little souls of whom one must not expect much. Do not press them, it would only make them fall and upset them; they would get disheartened and melancholy.

Like the great St. Paul, Mother de Chaugy says

she was a tender mother amongst her children so that people marvelled how she could attend to such minute things, to such little attentions for them, when she had so much to do.

The Saint's advice to Superiors, which is to be found very fully in her correspondence, is epitomised in these words to Mother de Blonay :

My dear Daughter, I have veered and turned to every side that can be imagined ; I have considered and tried every method of government, and in the end I have come to the conclusion that that of mildness, humility, sincerity and patient forbearance is the best and should be adhered to by the Superiors of the Visitation. And to another, speaking of correction, she says : The longer I live the more I see that it is sweetness we need for finding a way into hearts and for abiding there, if we want to make others do their duty towards God.

When visiting one of the monasteries she concludes a talk on the necessity and the advantage of utter self-renouncement, inward and outward, with these words :

The strongest desire I have is to see you, my Sisters, earnest in doing your duty and in advancing toward perfection. So that what afflicts me or what comforts me most in the world is your frailty or your virtue. The Mother's love I bear you makes me long for your happiness and your spiritual profit. I am the most faulty of us all, yet I know that the filial love you bear me urges you to give me consolation. Thanks to my God I do not sin of deliberate purpose and I trust that if you pray for me I shall rise out of my wretchedness and for the future do my duty better. I know that you, too, will do yours and that you sin not with reflection. Let us pray earnestly for each other ; not only for those with whom we live but for

every member of the Institute ; for the dearest wish of my heart is that all our monasteries should have *but one heart and one soul in God.* (*Entr.* lxiii.)

The following few thoughts on humility are from the *Paroles Consolantes :*

The spirit of God leads to perfect submission : it acts in us sweetly and gently. It makes us choose to be one with our Sisters in life and action, in preference to seeking for imaginary virtues which we think to light upon by the exterior mortifications we contrive for ourselves. If you take my advice you will mortify yourselves by not practising the mortifications you desire, and believe me, in this way you will practise the true virtue of mortification and the zeal which God is asking of you.

Be faithful in retrenching by holy mortification whatever you find a hindrance to your undertaking—that is, to religious perfection. Crush, as far as in you lies, these longings to do and to suffer. Reduce them all to the practice of virtue by making use tranquilly and diligently of the occasions God presents to you as the moments pass.

Never shall we be pleasing to God save by a strong, virile and perseverant exercise of the holy virtue of mortification. Before I read Holy Scripture I used to think that it was not so difficult to get to heaven, that so many things and so much self-denial were not necessary. But since I have read what Our Lord and the Apostles say I see very well that we cannot live according to our passions and inclinations, that we must suffer and endure, that there is no other way to work out our salvation than by the cross and by suffering. In fact that we must will good and do it, for it is by good works that heaven is peopled. All lies, then, in this.

Once we surrender ourselves to the operations of love it is never satisfied until it has reduced the soul to a total annihilation of self.

The great secret of the spiritual life is to take each thing in course as God sends it, to suffer when He wishes us to suffer, to act when He wishes us to act. In short, at all times to do His will. Turn what way we will we must come to the conclusion that there is no virtue without dying to self, without slaying our natural inclinations and humours to range our whole being under obedience, under Our Lord's standard—the holy cross.

The recompense that Our Lord promises to him who conquers his own nature is magnificently expressed in these words : *I will give him to taste of the hidden manna*,[1] which as soon as he has tasted he will no more care for all the delights of earth. But, remark, in order to taste this manna he must be a conqueror ; it is not for the coward ; it is for the valiant, the courageous, the strong ; for souls determined to eradicate all that they see in themselves antagonistic to God, to His will, to His divine intentions ; souls who have no reserves, who give all, who hold to nothing in life ; souls who slay all, and in slaying all possess all. (*Oeuvres*, t. iii, pp. 434-440.)

[1] To him that overcometh I will give the hidden manna.—Apoc. ii. 17.

Part II

INSTRUCTIONS ON PRAYER

CHAPTER I

THE SAINT'S PRAYER

During her lifetime the Foundress of the Visitation established eighty-six houses of her Order, and she was the moving spirit of them all. Over two thousand of her letters are extant, and it is estimated that she wrote eleven thousand. She kept three secretaries busily at work, so it cannot be denied that she lived in the turmoil of affairs. Yet was she a true contemplative because she interpreted everything, material or spiritual, important or trivial, from the standpoint of faith. She saw God through all, as Christ Himself saw His heavenly Father in every action that came under His observation while on earth ; she read the will of God across every event of her life, and the thought made all things welcome to her, because, to fulfil God's will was so infinitely beyond every other desire of her heart that, once discerned, to accomplish it became her absorbing occupation. " I have never seen," says St. Francis, " such singleness of purpose, such acceptance of the will of God, such fervour in prayer as this good Mother shows."

And how much the holy Bishop leant on " the good Mother " for the formation and success of the Visitation betrays itself in the following extract from a letter enjoining her, for the sake of their beloved Congregation, to take care of her health, " for," he says, " you know my dear Mother that you are in this

enterprise the courage of my heart and the heart of my courage."[1]

However arid, dry, unaffective her prayer, and this throughout her life seems to have been its dominant note, yet did she so exercise her faith as to use it as flame and fire to enlighten and kindle her instructions and her own life. " I speak," she writes, " about God, I give encouragement to others when opportunity arises, I write as if I feel and relish what I say, yet, all, the while, it is with repugnance and against the grain : but it is impossible to explain this in the way I feel it."[2]

And to another : " You put me to confusion by asking me about my prayer. Alas ! Daughter, it is usually nothing but distractions and a little suffering ; for what can a poor pitiful mind filled with all sorts of business do ? I tell you plainly, in confidence, that for about twenty years God has taken away from me all power of any prayer of the understanding and reflection —that is meditation. And all I can do is to suffer and keep myself very simply before God, clinging with complete abandonment to His action within me, making no acts unless incited to them by Him, waiting there for whatever in His goodness He will give me." [3]

To one who was far advanced in holy union and intimacy with God she writes :

" Ask God in your mute language to establish His reign and His union in me and I am asking Him to continue His graces to you. . . . Alas ! I am in no way capable of these sublime ways, but ask God to make me truly humble."[4]

From our Saint's own account of herself we turn

[1] *Oeuvres*, de Chaugy, *Mémoires, 2me partie*, ch. vii, p. 172.
[2] *Ibid.*, t. vii, vol. iv, *lettre* mdxviii, p. 710.
[3] *Oeuvres*, t. viii, vol. v, *lettre* mcmlxviii, p. 673.
[4] *Ibid.*, t. viii, vol. v, *lettre* mdclxxvii, p. 232.

to Mother de Chaugy's *Memoirs* in which she tells us : " There was no way however secret, no road however isolated or unfamiliar, no path however narrow or obscure in the inward spiritual life with which this Blessed Mother was not thoroughly conversant. Upon whatever form of prayer, of sublime union, of purified love or inward suffering she was consulted by the many souls who sought her guidance, her mind, illumined by God, satisfied the demand made upon it. . . . Those who consulted her felt an inward conviction that her teaching was not only the fruit of infused knowledge but likewise bought at the high cost of personal experience."[1]

St. Jane Frances was wont to say that for an enlightened direction of souls there were two secrets ; first, a knowledge of the attraction of God in each soul with the secret of knowing how to make that attraction clear to the soul ; second, that God's interests must be the sole aim of the director who should neither desire any appreciation of, nor have any special esteem or partiality for his own method of direction, nor should there be any attachment thereto on the part of the soul directed. She said that God in His mercy had freed her of any design or desire to gain the affections of creatures, and that His having commanded us to love one another ought to be enough for us. Superiors who wish to guide others by their own attraction rather than by the attraction God may have given, impede instead of advancing souls.[2]

Prayer is the vehicle which carries us in thought and spirit more quickly than any other medium to our eternal Home ; it puts us in direct communication with the unseen world, " it enables us to inhale the air of eternity in which we are eventually to live."

[1] *Ibid.*, de Chaugy, *Mémoires, 3me partie,* ch. xxx, p. 536.
[2] *Ibid.*, de Chaugy, *Mémoires, 3me partie,* ch. xxx, p. 537.

And St. Jane tells us that St. Francis often said: "The faults of our Daughters come from their not thinking and not speaking more frequently about eternity."[1] He had, she said, such a desire that we should familiarise ourselves with our eternal Home that he wished us to speak of it as of the other Houses of our Order—of Lyons, of Paris, of Heaven.[2]

"Daughters of Prayer," for such St. Francis called his Religious, he would have the thought of their Home-coming, of the joys that awaited them so continually in their hearts that it would come spontaneously to their lips and be an everyday topic, a reality, an essential element of their common life. And he did not fail to remind them that "He who gives himself with his whole heart to the love of God shuts out from his understanding all discourse of worldly things the more ardently to meditate on the divine. He gathers up all his aims and interests into the one interest of loving God. For he who aspires to Heavenly love must carefully reserve for it his leisure, his spirit and his affections."[3]

The cultivation of a life of inward activity is ever in the forefront of the teaching of both Saints. Speaking of Our Lord's Passion, St. Jane Frances tells the

[1] *Entr.* lxxii.

[2] *Entr.* xxiii.

[3] *Traité de l'Amour de Dieu*, t. v. vol. ii, l, xii, ch. iii. From the ensuing illustration it is evident that St. Francis did not intend his words to be taken in too restricted a sense. "St. Bernard," he says, "in no way impeded the progress he desired to make in holy love by frequenting the courts and armies of great princes, wherein he exerted his influence to bring affairs of state into conformity with God's service and glory. In so doing he changed his habitation but he did not change his heart. As he himself says, these changes were made in him but not of him. Whoso is a slave to the favours of the court, to the prizes of law, to the honours of war, alas! all is over with him; he cannot sing the hymn of divine love. But God protects such a one if he goes to court, to the bar or to war by necessity or for duty's sake and he should neither be so scrupulous as to abandon his good and lawful pursuit nor so rash and presumptuous as to go or to abide there unless by necessity or duty." *Ibid.*—Extracts from ch. iv, p. 327.

Sisters that in meditating on the mystery they must also weigh the reformation of manners and consider how best to conform their actions to those which Jesus Christ has done and suffered : that the highest science of prayer, its greatest profit, lies in suffering, and humiliating oneself rather than in feeling relish and consolations ; and she concludes with these words : " To be faithful to the resolve to do violence to ourselves we must be thorough." [1] (See p. 211).

In meditation she judged the considerations to be for no other end than to kindle the affections. (See pp. 222-223.)

And the affections in turn kindle the resolve to amend, of which St. Francis says : " It suffices in all meditation to draw from it good resolutions for your amendment and for constancy in the love of God." [2]

We ought never, says St. Jane, to leave prayer without having made resolutions that are good, efficacious, workable ; otherwise there is no use in making them. (See p. 189.)

In the ensuing pages we have omitted much of St. Jane Frances's writings on prayer because the same teaching addressed to different hearers is, of necessity. though in varied language, frequently repeated. But the substance of her instructions is, we think, comprised in them. Yet even this abbreviation is not without reiteration. But all things considered, it appears to us better, as the thoughts that live are few, to disregard the recurrence of them whenever the reiteration intensifies or gives new or added significance to the Saint's words and ideas.

[1] T. iii, p. 531.
[2] *Oeuvres de S. F. de Sales*, t. x. vol. IV, *lettre à Madame de Miendry* p. 85.

CHAPTER II

PRAYER

HOW TO LIVE IN THE DIVINE PRESENCE

The virtues of silence, recollection, modesty, tranquillity, simplicity, being all essential to the true practice of the Presence of God we give the pith of St. Jane Frances's instructions upon them under this heading.

Our Saint tells us that to acquire perfection St. Francis used to say : " We need know little, desire little, think little, speak little, but love God a great deal and do and suffer much for Him."

Now this, she goes on to say, is achieved by being very faithful in the practice of the true observance as we learn it ; and if in this way we keep ourselves in close union with God, He will give us all needful light. (*Réps. sur le chap.* i, p. 2.)

Again : Since this divine Saviour deigns to dwell continually within us, as in His temple, let us, dear Daughters, faithfully abide with Him and never leave Him save to execute His commands, and, having done so, come back straightway to this holy and simple attention before Him. I strongly recommend this practice to you because it is an admirable way of perfecting all our actions.

Our Blessed Father told me that the greater part of the failings of religious women comes from a want of attention in maintaining ourselves in the Divine

presence, but, he said, when we perform our actions purely for the love of God we are attentive to His presence, for, to be continuously and actually conscious of it is not in our power. Those to whom this gift is given possess it by a special grace. But we have only to be faithful to recollection and if we fail therein to humble ourselves, going from humility to God and from God to humility. Above all he would have us go to God with the trustfulness of a child to its mother. (*Réps.* p. 36-7.)

Elsewhere she says :

The Sisters are not to force their minds to this constant attention, but those to whom this favour of living knowingly in God's presence is vouchsafed should bring to it a very faithful correspondence. (*Réps.* p. 313-4.)

To be in a hurry about what we do stifles the spirit of prayer, hinders the frequent return of the mind to God and impedes that abidance in His presence which should be our aim. (*Ibid., sur la* xivme. *Const.*, p. 177.)

In a Chapter held in the first week of Advent, speaking of our Lady, St. Jane says :

Our glorious Mistress kept her heart in uninterrupted colloquy with the Divine Word who was within her pure and chaste womb. So should we in the highest part of our soul and mind look at our Lord and there shut ourselves up alone with Him, talk with Him, sit at His feet ; and this, not only after communion but all the day. (*Exh.* i, p. 163.)

And on the feast of the Nativity she says that St. Francis once told her that when the kings came, at our Saviour's birth, to adore the new-born Child, our Lady did not trouble herself to make long speeches to them, nor did she take another posture, inasmuch

as she was already, out of reverence for her Son, in an attitude of utmost gravity and respect. And that when the shepherds came she received them graciously and simply, making much of them and looking with affection upon them. Now from this, our Saint tells the Sisters they should draw two fruits : first, that of great exterior modesty, the outcome of the inward calm that comes of well mortified passions and of recollection of the senses in God, whose eyes are always fixed upon them. And this in such wise that if sent to the parlour to speak with princes or princesses they should have no need to prepare a speech, nor consider what to talk about, but with humble and faithful attention to God, say simply and artlessly what He will give them to say. The second fruit is that we ought to be frank and simple with our Sisters, respecting and loving them dearly, be they superior, equal or inferior, thinking always first of them and last of ourselves.

The Saint, she adds, told me again on the subject of this feast that our Lady will never be born save in hearts that are profoundly humble and have become great in simplicity and cordiality. (*Exh.* xvii, p. 106.)

And for the feast of the Visitation :

We owe a great deal to our Blessed Lady. Look upon her in this journey and observe how her inward life being dependent on her Son, she drew therefrom her exquisite and supernatural modesty (for though He was hidden from her bodily eyes she felt and carried Him in her womb). So would I have you, my Daughters, enamoured with, and faithful to, this continual presence of God which is so strictly enjoined upon us. In very deed, it is the sole way of acquiring modesty, for whatsoever is without, proceeds, of a surety, from that which is within ; and if all within, your senses and your passions, are well-ordered, your

heart in good estate, then, inevitably, your exterior, your whole deportment, will be composed and well adjusted ; you will exhale a sweet odour to your neighbour : for this virtue gives greater edification and good example than can be expressed. (*Exh.* xvi, p. 202.)

Speaking of this simple keeping in the presence of God being sufficient and effectual to make straight all our actions and intentions without renewing our attention, though in matters of great importance it is well to do so, the Saint explains that she is here speaking for souls far advanced and whom God Himself occupies, and draws by His grace in this way of loving simplicity. (*Entr.* xliv.)

In her next Conference St. Jane tells her Children, treating still of Inward Perfection, that the mind is so constituted that it must always be doing something and if their minds are not occupied with God they will be occupied in useless things ; and warns them, as she so often does, that they are too much concerned with that is being done by and around them, and that this is most detrimental to the spirit of recollection. In a word, she says to them (less bluntly indeed, but quite as clearly) what one of her greatest Daughters of later years[1] would have her Children say to themselves : " I am not commissioned to drive the coach."

Those whose passions are strong and who have much to correct in the beginning ought to consider how to overcome their failings ; it would not be well for them to think of nothing else but keeping close to God as they are not yet capable of recollection : having many faults to master they would find it difficult to be always occupied in loving God. Self-conquest and mortification must be their aim and endeavour. But

[1] Mother Marie de Sales Chappuis.

I would advise them while thus engaged ofttimes to turn to God, without whose help their task would be a very difficult one ; so acting, they will walk with both feet and will make a long journey in short time. When we are weak all the more do we need to put our trust in God, saying like David, My enemies are very numerous Lord but I leave the care of them to Thee.[1] *Entr.* i, p. 401-2.)

On these words of the Constitution, *Let them observe in all their actions great modesty, simplicity and tranquillity*, the Mother repeats :

To keep ourselves in the presence of God is the best way of practising the virtue of modesty, and, she continues, the affected and constrained postures of the world must therefore be absolutely avoided ; they are intolerable in Religious who ought to be so simple and lowly. This chapter of the Constitutions together with the Conference [of St. Francis] upon Modesty teach how to practise these virtues : they should therefore be studied, for the Rule makes no exemptions in the practice of them. Indeed there is nothing more pleasing than to see a soul tranquil in her conversation, her demeanour and her actions ; it is a help to all the other virtues and serves to adorn them. For this reason our holy Founder particularly recommended tranquillity. He constantly said : " Maintain peace of heart and tranquillity, never let anxiety take hold of you nor let yourself be worried whatsoever may happen to or around you." Tranquillity puts an end to all haste and levity because it does all things in a spirit of repose, I do not mean slowly and carelessly but quietly as before God.

[1] Consider my enemies for they are multiplied and have hated me with an unjust hatred. Keep thou my soul, and deliver me ; I shall not be ashamed for I have hoped in thee.—Ps. xxiv, 19, 20.

The following definition of simplicity is in answer to a query put by one of the Sisters, the substance of which the Saint repeats in her reply :

Certainly not, Sister, a person whose exterior was quiet and composed while her inward life was dissipated, could not be called simple, neither is that soul simple who would do all her actions for the eye of creatures and not for God alone. The one and only aim of a simple soul should be God and His good pleasure. . . . There is no doubt, Sister, simplicity precludes all subtilty and self-seeking, all studied ways, multiplicity of thoughts and useless acts. It is a certain candour which shows exteriorly what we really are within ; it is a stranger to all wiliness, concealment and equivocation. [1]

Let their speech be humble and low. Drawing attention to these words of the Constitution as being most important and suitable to a religious and recollected soul, St. Jane says : When it is not the time of recreation we ought always to speak in a low tone but intelligibly and never without necessity. It is a shameful thing to see a Religious talking loudly, and is very disedifying both within and without the monastery.

The Constitution continues : *Let their eyes be gentle and serene.* In others words, recollected in God. There is nothing so unbecoming in a Religious as certain little uncalled-for fits of laughter during conversation. It is a sign of levity and quite contrary to the gentle and humble gravity recommended by the Rule. (*Rép. sur la Cont., 23me*, p. 236-7.)

Mother de Chaugy tells us that one day when she was a novice the Mother said to her : My Daughter, are you never on your guard against this great activity

[1] For further instructions on simplicity see pp. 196-197.

of mind? I know very well that since it is your natural temperament you will have difficulty in subduing it, but I know also that if you were faithful you would not be so impetuous. You fail in religious modesty in a hundred ways, you bend your head as if you wanted to look devout, you gesticulate with every word you speak, you walk in quite a worldly fashion. You have a knack of giving a little twirl to your shoulders when you bow; all this savours of girls of the world. So you see you have plenty to reform before acquiring the gravity and decorum of a Religious. Often read the constitution of Modesty. Question your mistress about this virtue and keep unceasingly in your heart these words of the Apostle: *Let your modesty be known to all men. The Lord is nigh.* (Phil. iv, 5.) Whose divine eye sees the exterior and penetrates the interior. (*Oeuvres*, vol. iii, p. 301 *Sq.*)

Although St. Jane Frances heartily enjoyed seeing her Daughters recreating in a spirit of holy freedom and gaiety, she discouraged any tendency to teasing or bantering one another in regard to their devotions, because she said: the Customary forbids it. (*Réps. sur le 24me art. du Coutumier*, p. 503.)

Again speaking of Simplicity, she says:

A true daughter of the Visitation should so love simplicity that if nature had not endowed her with this virtue and she thereby failed against it, grace would straightway supply the want and enable her to practise it. Simplicity does not philosophise on what others do or say. Never swerving from its search for God and His will, it loyally shuts out the attention from other things and keeps it exclusively for Him. Assuredly, it is a clear sign that there is a great dearth of God in the soul if she spends her time considering and discussing the why and wherefore of the actions

of others. Nothing makes us more like unto God than simplicity : he who possesses it is perfect.

And again referring to St. Francis's favourite maxim for acquiring perfection, *Ask for nothing and refuse nothing*, our Saint continues : Few things are needed for perfection : to will what is right and to do it—all lies in this. But it is rare, indeed, to find one who will take in hand in real earnest and with determination the complete renunciation of self entailed therein. (*Entr.* xxvii).

Perfect simplicity, my Daughter, consists in having but one single aim in all our actions ; that of pleasing God. The second practice which follows upon this is, in everything good or ill that befalls us, to see only the will of God : Then whatsoever the event we shall always be tranquil because we shall have no love, no desire other than that of His adorable will. And this even though some happening may [apparently] delay our perfection at which, nevertheless, we shall not cease to toil. The third practice entailed by this virtue is to strip our faults of all veiling and lay them bare with the utmost candour [before those who guide us] the fourth is to be truthful in our speech, not multiplying our words especially when there is question of justifying ourselves. The fifth, with entire trust to commit ourselves to Divine Providence, living from day to day with neither forethought nor care for ourselves, but doing well at each moment what we are ordered to do according to our vocation. If we faithfully make use of occasions as they present themselves we may be certain that God, for His glory and our sanctification, will not fail to provide us with greater opportunities.

We cannot be truly simple and have so many cares for the future. Genuine simplicity hinders reflections on our actions and makes us artless. If our actions

are good we have no need to consider them, if they are imperfect our heart will surely tell us and if we make an open breast of it to those who direct us they will have judgment to distinguish. I consider it an act of great perfection to conform ourselves in all things to the community and from this never of our own choice to desist, and more especially, as it is so good a way of becoming united to our neighbour as well as an excellent means of hiding one's perfection from oneself. In its practice is to be found a certain simplicity of heart which contains absolutely all perfection. This sacred simplicity holds the soul regardless of aught else but God and enables her to live within herself in order to apply herself wholly and solely to the love of her supreme good. She effects this by the simple observance of her Rule without effusive desires to look beyond for perfection. She seeks not to achieve striking things which might bring upon her the esteem of creatures, she keeps herself in lowliness and self-abasement. She has no great satisfactions, because she does nothing wherein she can find them, nothing more than the community, nothing it seems to her of any profit. And in this way the knowledge of her holiness is hidden from her. God alone sees it and she ravishes His Heart by this divine simplicity ; uniting herself to Him by a perfectly pure, perfectly simple, perfectly loyal love. She no longer heeds the suggestions of self-love, no longer listens to its persuasions, no longer is concerned about her own views or methods, which by conspicuous actions or great undertakings might win her distinction.

Such a soul enjoys an abiding peace ; she can say that she is free by divine union to rise above herself. Therefore, my Daughter, never think that you are doing little in following the common life. (*Ibid.*, xxix.)

Follow God in simplicity of heart, submitting to the directions given you. It is not for you to make your own plans ; that belongs to those to whom God has committed the care of your soul. We who are looked upon as being so perfect and who are so often overtaken by distractions. It is a thought that puts one to the blush. But God permits it to keep us humble.

Don't think so much about your perfection but do from moment to moment the best you can. Try gradually to get rid of self, that this self may be swallowed up in God. The soul whose only desire is to belong to God is without anxiety save that which comes to her from the researches of self-love and from yielding to self-satisfaction. (*Ibid.*, xxv.)

In one of the meditations of St. Jane Frances's Retreat we find the following impressive words :

Listen, my Daughters, to what the divine Master says to us : *Unless you become as little children you cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven.*[1] O lesson of innocence, of simplicity, of openness, of good faith, of artlessness, of perfect submission. What dost Thou say Lord ? *Unless we become as little children* ; O terrible threat. We do not half weigh its import, its gravity. (*Méd.* xvii, p. 40.)

In another conversation with her Sisters, St. Jane thus encourages them :

There is, she says, no doubt that a soul does much more for God who all day long is resisting useless thoughts and who when she becomes conscious of them straightway brings her mind back to God (herein is true virtue) than another who has great facility in turning to God and in rejecting all that is irrelevant. Let such souls with courage, faithfulness and constancy keep to this practice of returning to God, for I assure them it is the real way of acquiring perfection in a short time. (*Entr.* viii.)

[1] Matt., xviii, 3.

A Sister says that she finds the presence of God an immense help to the practice of virtue. Yes, replies our Saint, all the Fathers of the Church agree that there is no better occupation in the spiritual life; they themselves practised it. This life-giving presence should, however, be accompanied by death-blows to self. The two exercises ought to go hand in hand. Presence of God and mortification mutually sustain one another. A mortified soul is more susceptible of, more easily permeated by, the divine presence. She has less distractions, she does not indulge in wandering thoughts, she tastes God, she keeps herself closely united to Him; and the enjoyment of this access to Him makes it easy to die to self, while the fortitude that comes of it enables her effectually to overcome or to mitigate difficulties and to endure all with comparative ease. (*Entr.* xxv.)

In order not to lose inward peace, our Saint tells the Sisters that they must do as St. Francis says: "Go to God without reflecting on their trouble." But, she continues, our way is to make known the reason of our failure and all that was said to us. In a word; we make many useless excuses which are absolutely contrary to the simplicity so strongly recommended by our Blessed Father. You are suffering from a little pain, you make a blunder, you have been ruffled; overlook it, pass on to God regardless of your trouble. You say: But I want to look at it so that I may offer it to God. That is good, yet in offering do not magnify it by making reflections that bring you to the conclusion that you have good reason to complain. Ah, truly we must be more generous, putting our satisfaction solely in God and abandoning ourselves absolutely to Him, who is our only desire. How beautiful is simplicity! Believe me, Daughters, a simple soul is a confident soul, she

trusts in God and has nothing to fear. Alack, there are times when all seems lost, everything appears to go wrong; without confidence at such times where should we then be? Like Abraham, we must hope against hope and recommending everything to God abide in peace, never ceasing to trust in His sweet providence, for it will take care of us. (*Entr.* lxix.)

You are good, my Daughters, but a little word in confidence; I do not see so much of the inward spirit as heretofore, perhaps it is because you are all at present so occupied in your employments. But, dear Daughters, this is just the time when we must be watchful lest these lower things draw us from the higher. Nothing so enervates the heart as dissipation, or any want of ardour in maintaining the affections in their purity. We fail in this watchfulness when we desire to follow our own inclinations, when we take the body only and not the spirit to the community exercises, when we leave our heart in our distaff or in whatever we may have been doing. Work well when it is the time for work, but whether through desire to please our Superior, or others or self do not let us give ourselves to it with over-eagerness; neither hurry to it to the detriment of devotion nor to the prejudice of exactitude to our religious exercises, for these are more beneficial to our monastery. Always *seek ye first the kingdom of God and all these things shall be added unto you.*[1] Our Blessed Father used to say that we must prefer obedience to all our little desires. (*Entr.* lxvi, p. 459-60.)

Reiterating what she held to be essential to union with God and living in His presence, St. Jane explains that she does not mean a sensible presence, a presence of feeling but of faith, inasmuch as perfection does

[1] Luke xii, 31.

not take account of the ways of the flesh, of the human spirit, does not consist in relish and sentiment but in walking in the way of the divine will with an absolute determination to belong to God ; in having a long-lived courage to undertake an all-round mortification and renunciation of self without ever growing weary. Short of this resolve it is impossible to be perfect. We dwell too much on sentiment and do not abound as we might in the life of the spirit and of faith. Oh, how safely does the soul walk that walks in simplicity !

God usually draws to great self-surrender souls that seriously aim at attaining purity of heart, and of such souls He takes peculiar care. Yes, of a truth it is a profound consolation to surrender ourselves wholly to God and to know that He sees and penetrates the most hidden deeps of our hearts. This manner of keeping ourselves in His presence is good, but I counsel you to be well on your guard against over-eagerness. (*Entrs.* xxxiv *et* xxxvi, pp. 345 *et* 350.)

Speaking of tranquillity :

It is a great happiness for souls to know how to remain in tranquillity not only when all goes well with them but more especially when they are in the midst of trouble and worry. It is likewise a true happiness to be able to do things without hurry, without disquietude ; with moderation, gentleness, equanimity; to maintain purity of heart and union of soul with God in all their undertakings. This, in a true sense, is tranquillity and repose. On the other hand, to perform our actions in a hurried manner is to run the risk of doing them badly, hence of offending the sovereign Majesty of God. And again, she repeats: We can hardly conceive how much the virtue of tranquillity helps towards the acquisition of all the other virtues. If we can sing a song, say good day,

notwithstanding our tribulation ; so may we always speak to God of something other than our pain and this is a form of tranquillity open to all.

Our Blessed Father once said to me : " The cross is from God, but it is a cross because we do not unite ourselves to it, for when we are truly resolved to will the cross God gives us, it is no longer a cross ; it is only because we do not will it that it is a cross ; and if it is from God why do we not will it ? " (*Entr.* lxii.)

Replying to a question on Silence, St. Jane Frances says :

Silence is not only instituted to hinder talking but likewise to calm the mind and make it restful near our Lord. We ought to be full of zeal for its maintainance. It has always been recommended and highly esteemed by founders of religious Orders. Indeed it is the ornament of religion, the mother of prayer and the guardian of the heart. So great are its fruits that it is said : nothing more is needed to reform a disordered monastery than to restore silence, and to disorder a very regular one it would suffice to abolish silence. Undoubtedly, the Houses that adhered to it with fidelity have a strong savour of holiness. For this reason I recommend it to you will all my heart. (*Réps. sur la Constitution*, vi, vii, *et* x, pp. 152-3.)

In another conversation on Silence the Saint says :

It is commonly admitted that there never was a great talker who was great in the spiritual life. Those who are on the watch to consider and observe others will never be humble nor occupied with God, nor will they come to much good in the ways of the spirit. For such occupation means distraction and a continual lack of inward silence. (*Réps. sur la Const.* xxvi, p. 276.)

On returning to Annecy from one of her Visitations, our Saint in her first Chapter says:

My dear Daughters, no sooner had I come back here than I became aware that we had grown remiss in silence, that we were dissipated and talkative and had lost our inward spirit. All this made me quite sick at heart. If we do not keep mind and heart recollected and close to God, our works will verily be profitless and we shall become slack in every way, for it is through this love of God's presence that we are to look for all our spiritual advancement. If fidelity to recollection fails us we shall wax feeble in all things and shall never be Daughters of solid virtue. Well, now be of good heart. Let us take courage and put ourselves straight again. We pay too much heed to outward things. We should not be so eager about them nor let them divert us from God, but looking unto Him, calm and attentive, do all with a tranquil heart. Emphasising this point, she continues. It is pitiable to see how full we are of the concerns of others and how wanting in looking within ourselves. We are neither exact enough nor delicate enough in regard to observance. (*Exh.* ix.)

The Holy Mother, St. Teresa, says that it is in our power to acquire recollection in a year, nay even in six months, by willing it, but for this we must love perfectly. St. Augustine says : " Love and do what you will." (*Entr.* lxiv.)

The following are a few extracts from our Saint's instructions to her novices :

If our will cherishes the desire to be loved and caressed by creatures we must distract it therefrom and attach it to God, disavowing this inclination so that we may have no such longings save in so far as God wills.

If our understanding is engaged in discursive and useless reflections in regard to creatures, we must strip ourselves of such attachments and gathering together

all our strength adhere to God alone, keeping in His sacred presence and discoursing solely with Him. In like manner should we do with our memory—our inclinations—serving God in all things, not according to our own but to His will. (*Inst.* iv, p. 522.)

Bidding them upon every occasion claim God's assistance, a novice asks : When we are ordered to do something which we do not understand, ought we so to put our trust in God as to abstain from asking how to do it? No, indeed, my Daughter, that would be to tempt God. When all human aid fails and we then put our whole trust in God He will work miracles rather than fail us, as He did when He stopped the sun and divided the sea. He has even worked miracles in our own Order for, at the beginning we knew not how we could subsist, and God provided admirably for us. He did in like manner in several of our Houses. *Ask*, He says, *and it shall be given to you, knock and it shall be opened.* [1] (*Inst.* vi, p. 529.)

Again : I have never liked multiplicity; I would bring our Sisters to unity. Whatever be our occupation we should so familiarise ourselves with the thought of God that our life would be a continual prayer. By dint of going to Him often we shall at length be carried to Him. (*Inst.* vii.)

And again, for the hundredth time, she says : I have an intense desire that our Sisters should be very simple and very faithful in making use of the means of perfection which divine providence offers, whatever they may be, without wishing or seeking for others, however good such may appear. (*Inst.* xiii.)

It is customary at the Visitation for the Mother to give the Sisters at certain seasons of the year what is called in the Order a Challenge (défi) *i.e., an invitation to a contest in the practice of some particular virtue.*

[1] Luke xi, 9.

Challenge on the Presence of God.

In the year 1623 we find her giving the following :

The *first* practice of this challenge is to do all our actions for the love of God, be it to avoid evil or to do good.

Second. To think of God simply according to our attraction, but not to do so by burdening ourselves with a multiplicity of ways and thoughts, nor with over-eagerness.

Third. To think in the light of faith that God is present by essence and by power, and that we ought to be ashamed to transgress in the presence of Him who is purity itself ; and to practice virtue because it is pleasing in His sight and because He loves virtuous souls.

Fourth. To look at God in our heart as in His temple which we must not dare to sully ; not to do anything to displease His divine Majesty nor leave anything undone that would give Him pleasure.

Fifth. To think how God looks down upon us from His throne in heaven and sees if we are faithful to His grace, if we are doing His will, if we are fulfilling our promise to Him, if we are maintaining the observance.

Sixth. To imitate Our Lord both in patiently bearing inward and outward trials and in the two virtues so dear to His Heart, meekness and humility, which He wished us to learn of Him.

Seventh. To keep ourselves united to His goodness by not allowing more than a quarter of an hour

to pass without making some act of love to His ever-present, divine Majesty, or some other act conformable to the attraction and devotion of each.

Eighth. In order to be very faithful to this challenge, to give an account of the virtues we have practised, of our attention to His adorable presence and of the faults that it has been the means of our avoiding. (Vol. ii, pp. 578-9.)

For the Advent of 1625 St. Jane gave the Sisters of Annecy the following practice as a Challenge :

This Challenge, my Dear Daughters, is founded on the doctrine of our Blessed Father who tells us *To go from God to humility and from humility to God.* You ask me how we are to carry out this counsel *to go to God on all occasions in lowliness of spirit?* My dear Daughter, when you have fallen into some considerable fault, instead of losing your time thinking over your failure go to God in sweet humility ; when praised, cast your heart upon God, humiliating yourself profoundly before Him ; when blamed and despised, go to God and annihilate yourself to lower depths before Him than those to which you have been brought down, acknowledge your wretchedness and confess that they who have thus treated you are fully justified in so doing. If thwarted, go to God, if commended, go to Him. Accept all from His hand.

As to meekness, I cannot undertake to speak to you thereof at this hour. All I can say to you about it is that when I beg of you to be meek of heart towards your neighbour I am not speaking of the heart of flesh, of the inferior part, but of the superior, the heart of the spirit. (*Challenge*, Vol. ii, p. 580.)

The Presence of God is the Book of Life.

The Rule, says St. Jane, which prescribes the practice of the presence of God is sufficiently—nay, perfectly—carried out when we are faithful in frequently recalling it to mind and in doing all for the love of God alone. The greatest happiness of the soul is to be found in this practice because in God we have all we need. It is the book of life from which the Saints drew all their wisdom. We must leave all things to God, nay, even at the cost of all things.

We grow slack in everything if we do not strive to keep ourselves recollected in the presence of God, for His presence is the threshold through which we ought to seek all progress in perfection.

If we fail in this fidelity to recollection, whatever else we may do is profitless and we shall never possess solid virtue. (*Paroles Consolantes.*)

And St. Francis tells us that :

" When we are in the presence of God we should have a double attention ; one to God the other to what we are doing." (*Oeuvres de S. F. de Sales*, t. xvi, Appendice, p. 404.)

CHAPTER III

On Preparation for and Practice of Prayer.

My dear Daughters, I have no gift of preaching and have nothing to say to you unless by asking me questions you give me something to talk about. (*Entr.* xxiii.)

Upon this encouragement the Sisters questioned St. Jane Frances. Some of her answers to their questions on the practice of the virtues the reader has already had. We will now give such others on prayer as may be useful to souls with the like aspirations.

The true and best preparation for prayer, she replies, is to keep very recollected all day long and to mortify oneself.[1] (*Réps*, art. xxv.)

Without mortification we shall never enjoy the fruit of prayer. (*Ibid.*, xl.)

You say you cannot keep so recollected without others perceiving it. Oh, my Sister, may it not be that under pretext of not wishing your recollection to be noticed you are indulging a negligent habit of not keeping your attention on God? We must not screen ourselves behind such excuses, our Blessed Father has condemned it. (*Ibid.*, xxv.)

I think simplicity is essential to prayer; He who walks simply walks in security. The purer, the simpler, the more without object prayer is, the more

[1] For further instruction on immediate and remote preparation for prayer, see pp. 206 and 212.

perfect and excellent it is; for God is a spirit and a very simple essence; the more delicately, familiarly and simply, therefore, we treat with Him, the more capable we become of uniting ourselves to Him, for the ingenuities of the human mind lead us away from Him and into our own ways; they only do us harm. Our Blessed Father used to say that women had not much capacity for making great considerations; nevertheless those who come to Religious life must be taught to use considerations when they are not habituated to this holy exercise, because, in the beginning, it is exceedingly important to impress on their minds the truths of Faith by calm and simple meditation. (*Ibid.*)

And again:

The attraction to simplicity is good when it teaches the soul to place its whole dependence on God, to love Him alone, to obey Him alone and never to follow her own inclinations. I say, and I will always say, that when God favours a soul with this sacred simplicity and familiarity with Himself and that this grace manifestly renders her more humble and faithful, no one should try to divert her therefrom, nor should she herself ever turn aside from this way, however good other paths may seem to her, for what can be better or more desirable than to repose in God? It is, I say, the true way and true holiness for that soul. If she draw back from it she will put herself in danger of resisting God and of causing His withdrawal from her, and afterwards she will have a great deal of trouble in returning to her place. I know not even if she ever will return. Truly, Sisters, our heart is made for God and can find no rest but in Him. Be it then its absorbing interest to fix itself wholly and securely in this divine centre and once there never to go hence; otherwise we shall not be without guilt before God. God is the treasure of the pure and

faithful soul and when she possesses her treasure let her enjoy it without desiring aught else. (*Entr.* lxii.)

Simplicity with God is a good device for prayer. By means of it the soul is conformed and made in some measure like unto God who is a most pure, holy, simple Spirit. Blessed are those who allow themselves to be led entirely as God draws them and follow this attraction in simplicity of heart, cutting off from their minds all curiosity, all multiplicity, all replies, all vain desire of introspection. It is a great misfortune that ofttimes we will speculate and make reflections when all God wants of us is to give ourselves up to the love of His sovereign goodness simply and absolutely like a little unclothed child in the arms and the bosom of its own dear mother.

When the soul is so greatly overwhelmed as hardly to know which way to turn or how to act, and this, not so much from fickle and volatile thoughts as from a certain cruel and bitter dryness which almost deprives her of the power of acting, God is the while making her suffer in a much higher way. Her prayer at such times should be the prayer of reverence, of submission, of endurance, of conformity, of poverty of spirit and she should hold herself before God as a poor person before his all-powerful deliverer. These or similar words should be hers : Ah, Lord, I am like the parched earth all burnt up and gaping from the cutting north wind and the cold. Thou seest I ask naught of Thee for when it is Thy good pleasure Thou wilt send me both the dew and the sunshine. When speaking as we sometimes do to Fathers of Religious Orders we must not say to them : ' I do nothing in meditation.' For those who are led by the way of loving simplicity do nothing by action but they do a great deal by enjoyment. When God draws the soul

to repose on His loving heart none must ever turn her aside therefrom, and those who interfere little know the harm they are doing to that soul and how displeasing their interference is to God.

To make a good meditation the mind must be leal and true, and stripped of all that is not God. The soul must not trouble herself about the considerations, conceptions, imaginations, and speculations of others, although she should honour them as things of God, which lead to Him ; it is enough for her to be with God in all the simplicity of her heart. I do not blame those who make considerations ; far from it. I often say that grave evils befall us for lack of considering our obligations and what God has done for us. What I do blame is that souls whom God has drawn to Himself by a great simplicity should be perpetually wanting some other way and not keep to that which God has given them. And others, too, I blame, whose minds are subtle and who try hard in meditation to make researches which are as useless as they are inquisitive.

The considerations I recommend are such as these : that Our Lord died for us, that He prepares His eternity for us, that He dwells with man in the most holy Sacrament to the end of time ; the four ends of man, the excellence of the virtues and of the religious life, the vanity of the world—all this strikes home. We, poor weak women that we are, require little science but much simplicity, humility and love.

Little can be said in common about prayer, for each has her own special attraction. However, this much can be said : we must take no heed of our consolations or our feelings at prayer unless they are productive of these fruits : mortification, complete surrender of self into the hands of God and of obedience, profound humility and holy simplicity. She who sees that she

derives these fruits from her prayer, together with punctual observance, may follow her way ; it is a good one and she will not stop there, but will go on, ever progressing if she be faithful in her correspondence to God.

We sometimes see souls who wish always to be in union with God, but are they humble and simple ? If they are thwarted do they bear it patiently ? Are they indifferent as to the occupation given them ? If not, I most certainly would advise them to undeceive themselves, for all recollection that does not produce such fruit is an amusement of self-love, a consolation that comes from nature or from the evil spirit. Then we see other souls who with a great attraction to prayer are strongly drawn to humility and simplicity with God. To test the reality of their union we must make them leave prayer, give them something to do to which we know they have a great dislike, some obedience that will go against the grain, that is hard and difficult ; subject them to some painful humiliation. If they bear these things humbly, meekly, silently we must certainly let them go their way for they are walking on the right road. But should they murmur or answer back deliberately (for being taken unawares they might well say a few words or do some act in which there would be no great harm) and continue to do so and go about the work enjoined them unwillingly, their union is not with God but with themselves ; in a word the workman is known by his work.

When God gives us consolations we must receive them in a spirit of deep humility, striving to touch ourselves to the quick with the sense of our own nothingness and unworthiness, after which let us enjoy the consolations with simplicity ; faithfully drawing from them their fruits, which we render

back to Our Lord who gave us these favours for no other end. (*Entr.* xxxiv.)

We ought to be the same out of the time of prayer as we desire to be while occupied in it. During the day we should take great care to keep our mind in God and to empty it of everything useless, especially that which does not concern us, because when we allow our mind to become dissipated we render it unfit for union with God. (*Ibid.*, xxxiii.)

My Daughter, it sometimes happens that we go to prayer having been all day dissipated and without recollection ; no wonder then that we are distracted at it, for we fully deserve to be. We follow our own inclinations, are not submissive under obedience, neither gentle nor condescending with our neighbour ; and yet we boldly go to prayer to be united to God in consolation and delights. If we find the door shut it serves us right.

A soul to whom God gives graces in prayer should take great heed to accompany them with true mortification and humility for that is the chief end for which these graces are given. If she fail in this the graces will not continue or else they are not true graces but only illusions. (*Ibid.*, xxxiv.)

I strongly recommend the prayer of affection. By this I mean prayer that is made with the heart and not with the understanding. It is practised in this way : When we have humbly placed ourselves in the presence of God let us not strain our heads to make considerations but use our affections instead, kindling them to the best of our power. Yet, if by means of inward prayer we cannot succeed in arousing them it is well to use vocal prayer, such as this : I thank Thee, my God, because Thy goodness permits me, a poor worm of the earth, (*néant*) to be here before Thee : again, O my Love, teach me how to speak to Thee, for

there is no happiness to equal that for me. The fact is we must go to God with great simplicity. But I would advise those who take Our Lord in the Garden of Olives and lead Him on until He reaches Calvary to give it up, for they are making a long way in a short time and are going too fast.

There are again souls who can do nothing at meditation but keep themselves with great honour and reverence before God, and this prayer is good. Others have bad thoughts and feelings by the thousand ; this is *to endure, to suffer*, and it is also prayer ; yet again there are others who have many distractions. In their case much patience is needed, but provided the distractions be not wilful, this prayer is likewise good. And finally there are those who go to prayer and find Our Lord as they wish and treat with Him according to their desire ; this is the prayer of repose wherein there is more to enjoy than to suffer. We must take great care to combat slothfulness for it is the cause of immense harm to the soul, and those who are slothful in prayer go to ruin from the root. (*Entr.* xxxiii.)

Elsewhere the saint says : The routine with which the sacraments are approached is the destruction of true piety and the cause of falling away in Religion. (*Fragments d'Entretiens.*)

To be a soul of prayer is to have great love for it, to be faithful in our preparation, to be very exact indeed in observing all the circumstances required for praying well, to be loyal in casting aside all distractions that occur therein, this is to be a soul of prayer. (*Ibid.*, xxxiii.)

There are three ways, St. Jane says, of making prayer.

The *first* is by the use of the imagination. We may, for instance, represent to ourselves the Divine Jesus in His cradle, in the arms of His holy Mother or of

the great St. Joseph. We may look upon Him lying between the ox and the ass, or see how His holy Mother lays Him in the crib, how she takes Him up again and feeds Him with her virginal milk. He who is her Creator and her God. But we must not pin the mind down to such details as picturing to ourselves the colour of His eyes or the shape of His mouth, rather should we simply represent the mystery to our imagination.[1] This way of meditating is good for those whose minds are still full of things of the world so that these thoughts filling the imagination may dislodge all others. (*Entr.* xxii.)

For those who are in trouble it is well to make use of the imagination because it is a good means of diverting them from their solicitude, their grief from useless reflections.

When meditating on the mysteries of the Passion let those who are beginners picture vividly to themselves the torments of Our Lord as if He were undergoing them then and there. But when souls begin to advance they must be guided by a still higher truth ; that our Lord's sufferings are passed and He now suffers no more. They must be taught to say some words to Him on what He has endured for love of us, and abide in this simple thought. (*Ibid.*, xxxiii.)

The second way is to make use of considerations by representing to ourselves the virtues Our Lord practised, His humility, patience, meekness, His charity towards His enemies and so on. These considerations stir the will and kindle the love of Our Lord. Hence follow practical resolutions for each day, and perseverant efforts to combat those passions and inclinations by which we are most liable to offend God. (*Ibid.*, xxxii.) When the affections are animated we

[1] *Cf. Œuvres de S. Francois de Sales*, t. xiii, pp. 183-184, *lettre à baronne de Chantal*, juin, 1606.

must not multiply words but pause a little to relish them and gently impress them on our hearts, looking simply at what our Lord does in the subject of our consideration and speaking a few words to Him about it or else words of love, of renunciation, of compunction, or other—in whatever way our attraction may draw us. (*Réps.*, Art. xxv.)

If God chooses to occupy the soul with Himself at the commencement of the meditation there need be no question of her going back to her point.

Let her keep herself quite simply near Him without labouring to work up the imagination nor multiplying words, for these usually are only hindrances to the prayer of good affections which is true prayer.

Or, it sometimes happens that the soul is occupied in contemplating one or other of the divine attributes. As long as God gives her this attraction she must be faithful to it. But when He withdraws this simple and loving perception and the soul becomes in consequence chilled and depressed, then must she open the door to words of love and submission; or again, of adoration, of acquiescence in His divine will. (*Entr.* xxxiii.)

With a delicate raillery befitting the hour of recreation, the Saint now proceeds to hook with their own bait those among her hearers who were more given to words than deeds.

There are souls, she says, who go to prayer with such overflowing eagerness and ardour that it is a great pleasure to see them, their words come with such enthusiasm and glow of feeling that they hardly give themselves time to breathe. Ah, Lord, they cry with such affection that it seems as if they were longing to melt away and be consumed before him.

And then, our Saint's simple earnestness drew from

her, as it always did on such occasions, a feasible remedy for such extravagant effusions.

This is not the way, she says, to make our meditation ; it must be made calmly and tranquilly, and repeating her instructions on the manner of going before God, she tells her children not to be astonished if their affections are not roused, for it only means that God is not then asking this of them. But, she continues, what He assuredly is asking of us, is to be quiet, tranquil and humble, and then, meditation ended, if there is still no stimulating the affections the soul must say to our Lord : I am indeed, my God, cold and heartless but that will not hinder me from being gentle to our Sisters. And with this loving resolve, leave prayer. (*Ibid.*)

To return to the Conference of the Three Ways of Prayer from which we have diverted in order to glean St. Jane's words relevant to these methods :

The Third way, she says, is to keep ourselves simply in God's presence by contemplating Him in some mystery with the eyes of faith, conversing lovingly with Him, heart to heart, confidingly, but so secretly, as if we did not wish even our good angel to hear.

This last manner of prayer is more liable to distractions than that of considerations, yet if we are very faithful God will give us this union of soul with Him. All three methods are good, but the last we must be careful not to take upon ourselves unless our Lord Himself draws us thereto. (*Ibid.*, xxxii.) But when He does we must give ourselves up to it with great humility and submission. (*Ibid.*, xxxvi.)

Our Blessed Father used to call it the prayer of simple surrender to God which, he said, was holy and salutary, and he considered that it contained all that could be desired for serving God.

Of all gifts that of holy prayer is only obtainable in the first place from God, therefore we must, without ever growing weary and with profound humility, continually ask it of Him. (*Réps.*, Art. xxv.)

Let us beware of wishing for these refined perfections which only make account of visions, transports, ecstasies—ofttimes nothing but delusions in which we think we see God in all things with desire for Him alone, and all the while are perpetually resenting the least thing in which we fancy we are concerned ; remarking everything that goes on, to laugh at it and talk about it ; and this not infrequently to the prejudice of our neighbour, neglecting meanwhile the practice of the little virtues. Eschew this kind of thing, I beseech you, dear Sisters. Be content to follow your way and the instructions you have received in such abundance, for in them is comprised the true and solid means of arriving at perfection.

As our Blessed Father was wont to say : Our Order is like a little March violet which has no brilliancy of colour yet ceases not and, by the help of God, will never cease, so long as it remains in the knowledge and love of its lowliness and abjection, to send forth a very sweet and agreeable odour to its divine Creator. (*Réps. sur le Coutumier*, Art. xxiv.)

It is the art of arts to put ourselves actually in the divine presence and to fathom this truth : that we are under the very eye of God and speaking to Him. (*Entr.* liii.)

Being questioned one day on how best to set about reforming the soul, St. Jane replied :

The first step towards self-reformation is self-knowledge accompanied by confidence in God. She then explains how to acquire this knowledge[1] and how in acquiring it the soul becomes aware of her utter in-

[1] See ch. on Humility and Mortification.

ability to reform herself save with God's assistance, for which, in her powerlessness and misery, she now implores. Henceforth putting her whole trust in God she may say with St. Paul, *I can do all things in Him who strengtheneth me.*[1] For with the grace of God all things become not only possible but easy. (*Entr.* i.)

And elsewhere she says : We can always pray when we wish, otherwise Our Lord would be commanding the impossible, which certainly is not the case, and we can do all with grace which never fails us. (T. iii, p. 524.)

When prayer is founded on mortification it is established upon a firm footing and one on which sooner or later it must be built. God's ordinary course is to give the grace of prayer after we have in good earnest practised and trained ourselves to mortification. Yet there are souls whom God raises to a high degree of prayer before they have laid a solid foundation of self-denial, perchance because He knows them to be so weak that without these sweets they would do naught of any value, nor have courage to persevere and to practise virtue.

If we find prayer difficult, let us not be disquieted nor attribute it to our own fault, nor think (on this account) it is profitless and displeasing to God. Such is not the case if only we have been faithful. Look at the example given us by the good Abraham and you will see clearly what I mean. I have such an affection for this good Patriarch. I love him. Now Abraham was wont to offer sacrifice and burnt offerings to the Lord and one day as he was making his offering some birds of prey alighted on the flesh of the victims, whereupon Abraham took a rod and literally spent the whole time of the sacrifice in driving them away. If at the end he had complained :

1 Phil. iv, 13.

O Lord, what a sorry offering I have made Thee in the midst of all the distractions of these birds of prey, assuredly Our Lord would have told him that his sacrifice had been acceptable because (which we know was true) the birds had not come by his wish and he had done all in his power to get rid of them. So it is with us ; when we are at prayer, although our distractions swarm like pestering flies, if they are displeasing to us and we faithfully do what we can to turn away from them, our prayer, is, we may be quite sure, both good and pleasing to God. (*Entr.* i.)

And again : When distractions are importunate and do what you will you cannot get rid of them, you must make the prayer of patience and humbly say your *Pater* or some other loving words. In this way we kindle in our hearts a desire to speak to God without waiting for Him to put milk and honey into our mouth, for He will have us help ourselves. (*Ibid.*, xxiv.)

And when at prayer a sense of our own misery and incapacity comes upon us there is no need to make speeches to Our Lord about it. To Him the very feeling speaks for us sufficiently of itself. (*Ibid.*, i.) Abide reverently in His presence, and whatever dryness may befall you, lose neither your peace nor your tranquillity. (*Ibid.*, xxxii.) Suffer lovingly your desolation, for this pure suffering is a very agreeable prayer to God when it is accompanied by humility, submission and trust, when the soul is content with His will alone and with the honour of dwelling in His presence. Here she may abide, regarding herself either as a slave or a poor man, a powerless creature, a disciple, a spouse, a daughter at her father's feet or, with such affections as the Holy Ghost shall suggest. (*Réps.*, Art. xxv. *et Entr.* liii.)

And speaking of the special inspirations God some-

times gives in prayer, St. Jane says : If God gives the soul a great desire and attraction to practise some particular virtue in as much as He requires it of her ; He gives her the thought simply and solely because He desires to see her practise with great diligence this virtue that very day. (*Entr.* i.)

The Sisters tell us that, one day as the Saint was kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament, her countenance became quite resplendent. Coming from thence to recreation, as soon as she had seated herself she spoke to them with a serenity and firmness that was altogether exceptional. Among other things she told them that, one day, towards the end of his life, St. Francis said to her while they were conversing together in Paris : I am fully resolved neither to betray souls nor to flatter them. If—— comes to me I will tell her the plain truth about herself. Whoever wishes to follow his own inclinations need not come to me but who wills to live for God let him come hither and I will serve him with all my heart. Then she added : He used these same words to one who did not reform, who had neither the courage nor the strength to bear what the Saint said to him, so he broke and our Blessed Father let him break.

She concludes this Conference by telling her children that she too has made a like resolve, and if she falls short of it, it will be from a lack of understanding and not from any fault of will. (*Entr.* vii.)

In her next Conference, evidently with the fervour of the grace she had received still burning within her, she continues to enforce her previous words, ending thus : Would that I had coals of fire to cast into your hearts that I might set them aglow, but I am not worthy to render such a service to Our Lord or to this House. (*Entr.* viii.)

When asked if it was well to reflect on our faults during prayer time, St Jane gave the following answer :

When our faults and the things we have said and done during the day come back to our minds at the time of prayer we must be faithful in turning away from them and unite our will with that of God, who permits us to be thus tried. We should look at the will of God in these distractions and unite ourselves to it instead of worrying because we cannot get rid of them. We must do likewise when throughout the day we feel dry, barren, and distracted, nor allow ourselves to be disturbed, but remain entirely submissive to what has been God's first manifest will for us. If it be His will that we should suffer in this way we must meekly and humbly acquiesce, because though God cannot will any infidelity on our part He permits it, to the end that being conscious of it we may humble and abase ourselves. In a word, the remedy of all our ills is to unite our will to that of God who really wishes us to be full of courage, as our Rule enjoins. (*Entr.* xviii.)

However, in a later Conference, speaking on the same subject, the Saint says : You may think over your faults quite simply at the time of prayer, but if you wish to look in detail at them and the persons against whom you have committed them, there is danger that instead of speaking to God your conversation would be with creatures and this would only serve to distract you. It is enough to say ; Ah, Lord, Thou knowest what a poor wretched thing I am. And say no more about it, for He knows it all well enough without our rehearsing it in detail. Thousands of useless reflections are made in this way, reflections that are wholly out of keeping with the simplicity so highly recommended to us by our Saint. (*Entr.* xxxiii.)

And again, in a Conference termed the Excellence of Prayer, St. Jane Frances says :

Prayer is the channel which unites the heart of a Religious with that of God. It draws waters from heaven which ebb and flow from us to God and from God to us. It is our chief act of Faith. Hence the words of the Apostle, *Without Faith it is impossible to please God*,[1] are applicable to prayer. It is the means we make use of to ask God and Jesus Christ, our only Deliverer, to save us, because we feel our weaknesses and defects so strong upon us that we should perish if He did not ceaselessly uphold us by new graces. We may say, in a certain sense, that whatsoever we do in religion—eating, sleeping—all is prayer when it is done simply in the order prescribed, without our own caprice or vain choice adding to or diminishing therefrom. The simple presence of our spirit before God to speak to Him alone, and of His Spirit before ours, forms the prayer, whether or no we have good thoughts and sentiments. Nothing is necessary save with entire simplicity and without making violent efforts to keep ourselves in His presence, striving to kindle love in our souls and not consciously to entertain distractions. In God's sight time so spent *is* prayer, for He loves the humble, patient endurance of vain and involuntary thoughts as much as our best thoughts at other times. Indeed the loving desire of the heart reaching out to God and the suffering of things that displease us is one of the most excellent of prayers.

Going on to speak of the prayer of petition, St. Jane says : When, having made some petition to God, we leave in His hands the granting or denying of it this is a mark of simplicity and of love of our God and He is overjoyed at a prayer of such submission ; just as it affects us to see a poor man who has asked an alms of

1 Heb. xi, 6.

us take no offence at our refusal. However troublesome his importunity or however long he hangs about us, are we not touched when at last he goes away with downcast eyes [and empty handed] after all his patient waiting ?

These words, *If the eye be single the whole body shall be lightsome*,[1] apply to the simplicity of the soul that prays in this manner, and, well pleasing to God will be all the good works following upon such a prayer while insensibly and invisibly the divine light is filling the soul. It frequently happens that we think we have light and grace when we lack it, and again, when we think we are going away empty we are filled with the spirit of God. Hence, at times that we are not conscious of having received light in prayer it is futile to seek for it, because the operations of the Holy Spirit are wholly inward and frequently unknown to the soul herself. Let us, then, when we pray, be as empty vessels before God that He may, as it were, distil into us His grace drop by drop. We should be almost as glad to return with our vessel empty as if He had filled it to the brim ; in the end He will fill it, provided we continue to come before Him in these dispositions. Holy Scripture says : *We know not whence He cometh nor whither He goeth.*[2] It is enough for us to know by the effects He daily produces in us, by the consciousness of our increasing strength, that we have received Him, without knowing how or when. Of this much we are certain : that it is prayer and the frequent offerings of our heart to God that has brought Him to us. We do not see the trees nor the bodies of men growing, nor should we, even if we watched them from morn till night, yet we are astonished afterwards to see their increase. So it is

[1] Luke xi, 34.
[2] John iii 8.

with the soul. If she faithfully correspond to the lights and attractions of grace she advances unawares in the way of God.

It is with the spirit of God which we ask for in prayer as with the body of God which the priest produces by the words of consecration : both hav ebeen promised to us by Jesus Christ, our Saviour, and are necessary for the nourishment of our souls ; yet neither the priest nor we, when we communicate, have ordinarily, any taste or perception thereof, but we digest It (to use this term) by faith, being certain on the word of God that though we have neither seen, felt nor tasted, It nourishes our souls, and that amid the inward darkness and dryness which continues after Its reception It brings us light and strength. The first of all prayers, the model of all others, is the prayer of the priest in offering to God the sacrifice of the Mass by which he changes the material bread of earth into the food of angels—His glorious Body.

It has pleased His infinite goodness to nourish us with this divine substance under the veil of bread and wine, amid the obscurity and dryness which accompany It in the Church on earth, while waiting the contemplation of His Godhead unveiled in the Church of heaven. There It will create in us the illumination and the pleasure inseparable therefrom. We have then no reason to complain if, in other private prayers which are all less than the prayer that changes bread and wine into the sacred Body of Jesus Christ and produces the great sacrifice of the Mass, there is no taste, no relish, no sensible light. The priest, even the most excellent, is not always exempt from distractions at the moment when he consecrates the Body of the Son of God, and perhaps there is not one who could say that in partaking of It he has sensibly tasted the substance of the divine food.

I know of persons closely united to God who have given themselves for many years to prayer yet have never had sensible consolations ; nevertheless, they have always appeared oblivious to the greatest temptations. Nothing could shake them, so resolute were they when it was a question of serving God and rendering testimony of their obedience and their love to Him. Without solace, without comfort, without sensible feeling ; with endless variety of pain and tribulation, yet did they deem themselves privileged to endure all gladly for the love of God. (*Entr.* xxx.)

As St. Jane is one day telling her Daughters of the heart-to-heart union and the full and childlike outpourings that ravish the heart of the Master, a Sister asks : Are we not then to listen to our Lord speaking to our hearts ? She replies : Of course you are and, having run over your point a little, just hearken to what He has to say to you, for it is by this means that He will give you good desires of serving Him.

And again :

You ask me, Daughter, how it would be if we meditated without knowing what we were doing or what were our affections at the time ? Oh, verily that would be to no profit—a waste of time that must not be. We should always (at least in the will, for of our feelings we must take no account) know in what we are occupied and what affections God has given us therein. We ought never to leave prayer without having made resolutions that are good, efficacious, workable, otherwise there is no use in making them.

You know, my dear Daughters, that prayer must be followed by mortification, that to advance in prayer means to advance in mortification ; with the same step progress is made in both. To this I always come back : mortification must be the plank for entering on prayer

and although it is during prayer that we receive good inspirations it is always mortification that obtains them for us. (*Entr.* xxxiii.)

In her next talk with what encouragement she leads the soul on to perfection in the ensuing words :

We do not understand wherein lies the essence of true prayer. It is simply this : cheerfully to receive every variety of obedience, to be employed as others wish and, as far as in us lies, to keep ourselves united to the will of God, for He looks only to the heart.

Prayer does not mean to be always on our knees or in some corner, very recollected, enjoying consolations. The soul that can say with truth that she is always ready at any time for whatever is commanded or wished of her can say with equal truth that she is always in prayer.

It is impossible for a truly humble soul to believe the praises and the good that are said of her because the light of God makes her know the excellence of virtue. And the more she advances the more she sees the purity required of the soul that tends to perfection, so that even the smallest imperfection appears to her very great. And when the Holy Spirit withdraws His light and sensible help she sees in herself nothing but imperfections and miseries. (*Ibid.*, xxxiv.)

On complete detachment to the will of God she says :

We must get into the habit of practising inward abnegation if we want to obtain from God perfect detachment in all our duties. But when some other attraction comes to us, of love, of union with God, of trust in Him, we should, undoubtedly, without hesitation, make full and faithful use of it, nor should we interrupt it for the sake of practising abnegation. Those who are but beginning to give themselves to prayer ought to conform their will in every imaginable way to the will of God, and to this they should confine

their efforts. In this sole point consists the highest perfection that can be reached in the spiritual life.

We ought to live in the present moment without care and without forecast, do things as they present themselves, make merchandise in good faith out of everything and have no other interest than that of pleasing God. For this end we must make use of the means provided by our vocation without going in quest of outside help. It is ridiculous for a soul who is conscious of being beset with, and full of, a thousand imperfections to aspire to divine favours. She has as yet only acquired virtues in desire, yet she covets their sweetest rewards, such as God is wont to bestow on those who by long and constant practice possess their virtues in reality. Before laying claim to crowns and glory, my Daughters, we must, in the dryness which befalls us at prayer, embrace the Cross of our Saviour. This is to be our first exercise and those who suffer the most should esteem themselves the most fortunate. The heart which has offended the goodness of God must never ask for these divine favours—these ineffable enjoyments and delights partaken of by innocent souls or by such as are purified by holy love—of this truth we should never lose sight. Neither are we to aspire to, or imagine that we deserve them, whatever service we may render the Divine Majesty. There is a lack of humility in making so much of serving God in dryness and in complaining so much about it. God gives us this trial to make us humble, not to exalt or trouble us. It is the devil who would have us make bad use of it. Nevertheless, we ought to sympathise with and comfort those who suffer from great and prolonged inward trials. A humble soul lives as submissive to God and as peacefully amid inward despoliation as if she were revelling in delights. It is often the weak to whom God gives

consolations. We, my Daughters, must have great courage and live in profound humility, not even fearing temptations, for God permits them in order to purify our hearts. Should it happen that we commit some fault by yielding to them, we must confess it, humble ourselves and abide in peace. This is the way a soul acts to whom God is everything. Let us do in like manner, give ourselves wholly to Him. . . In order to do everything in due season the mind should keep itself in a restful state. When it is humble and tranquil it is the dwelling-place, the haven of rest of the Holy Spirit. (*Entr.* xxxv.)

The following are a few extracts from St. Jane Frances's *Paroles Consolantes* :

To understand the value of prayer and bring home to ourselves the power it exercises over the heart of God I know no more pregnant words than those so often on the lips of St. Bernard : " God does not ask for brilliancy but for ardour in prayer." If prayer is languishing, it is no longer progressive but if it is animated with a glowing fervour it never returns empty-handed but laden with spoil, with palms of victory.

St. Francis used to say that in the soul as in the temple of Solomon there are four storeys. The first is the crude knowledge that comes through the senses ; the second the knowledge that comes through reason, a little higher than the first ; the third, far higher than either of these, is the knowledge that comes of faith through a supernatural light ; the fourth, the *sancta sanctorum* is the fine point of the soul[1] which is called *spirit* where takes place surrenders and acquiescences. Provided this fine or highest point always regards God, we need not be at all uneasy nor anxious about what takes place in the lower storeys.

[1] What mystics call the apex or fund, the essence of the soul.

Our whole life and exercises being for the exultation of Holy Church, the salvation of our neighbour and our union with God, we need not trouble ourselves to offer up, say, what we do to-day for Holy Church, to-morrow for the conversion of infidels ; nor need we direct our intention in each of our exercises for this or that end. No, my Daughters, be satisfied with what is laid down for us, do that well without imposing on yourselves new and extraordinary conditions. The human spirit is too fond of finding out improved ways of doing things. Believe me, if we do what is set down for us by our Blessed Father we shall amply satisfy our obligations to assist by our prayers and good works Holy Church and the salvation of our neighbour.

Who does not know that relish, lights, spiritual activities, are not in our own power and that it is solely over the acts of the will that we have any power? Why then torment ourselves when we cannot change things ? But Our Lord is not very far from us in our aridities and He always provides us with the necessary means to live through them ; that ought to be enough for us, so let us not worry about it.

Dryness, which beginners in the spiritual life may look upon as an insipid and hidden grace, is more precious than the greatest consolations ; for experience teaches us that all virtues grow under aridities and trials, like corn under the snow, and that in these times of obscurity God hides His Hand effectually to correct negligence and to enable us to make notable progress in all virtues.

There is no doubt that distractions usually multiply according to the degree of the vivacity of the mind and that there are minds so restless that they may be distracted all the time of an Office without their will being any more culpable than in the dreams that come to them in sleep.

Patience under these circumstances, continual aspirations towards God, reanimated from time to time, are often worth more, I mean, are more profitable to the soul, than the most peaceful, calm and delightful attention.

I know of no greater happiness than that of the recollected soul, the soul of prayer who knows how to treat with God. She has found, our Blessed Father used to say, the sacred alchemy that changes all her miseries into the gold of a most ardent charity, and of lasting heavenly consolations. She experiences that there is no joy to equal the joy of living with God alone, she and God alone, detached from all created things. (*Oeuvres*, t iii. pp. 405-476.)

When speaking to the novices St. Jane says :

It is self-interest that hinders christian perfection and retards religious perfection. A magnanimous spirit stripped of the world and striving to mortify the flesh will in a short time attain to a very high degree of perfection, of loving union with its God—the treasure of treasures. The faithful spouse of Jesus Christ should not go in search of, nor have any other interest than that of the glory of her Spouse and King. Many take more pleasure in pleasing themselves than in pleasing God, a deplorable thing in these times. (*Inst.* xviii. on these words : " if any man will come after Me," etc.)

In another Instruction she tells the novices that they should be more attentive to do good than to avoid evil. By this, she says, I mean little imperfections, for you appear to me to be under such constraint, so cramped, as if you were pressed between two boards, so frightened of doing or saying the wrong thing. This should not be, my Daughters, there must be holy liberty, modesty, freedom of mind and heart ; sweet affability

and graciousness in your conversation. You should be humble, courageous, equable and artless. Such is our spirit, and not this timid straitened way—afraid of everything. Get rid of these narrow hearts, I beg of you, and replace them with broad, capacious, great hearts, that will hold God and all His graces and the virtues of our vocation without constraint. Be large-minded. The true handmaid of the Lord should bear in her heart and on her countenance candour, mildness, openness ; the holy liberty of the children of God. The soul that is truly humble is never constrained, because humility confers holy liberty and opens the heart to receive everything from the hand of God. Constraint and restraint are for the children of the world who live under the world's bondage and not for the children of God who live under His providence wholly resigned and wholly free, for His yoke is sweet and light.

When I tell you to be open and free I do not mean that you are to go out of bounds, say idle words, let your eyes wander and such like, for this would be false liberty. My meaning is that whatever you do should be done in a joyous spirit with pleasure, seeing that all is done to please God. (*Inst.* xix.)

On the words : *My Son give me thy heart*,[1] whoso, St. Jane says, has a man's heart has the whole man. The heart is the seat of love and (our Lord says) When I shall have thy heart I will set My love upon it, nay, I will make it the dwelling-place of My love and consequent on this all the rest will follow. (*Inst.* xxii.)

It would seem as if St. Jane Frances thought she could never sufficiently impress upon her spiritual children the obligations entailed by any special attraction vouchsafed them by God. They were

[1] Prov. xxiii 26.

wholly to abandon themselves to it, to strive to attain purity of heart to fit them for it, and to guard against the least imperfection that might impede its action. All methods, all forms of devotion encouraged by the Church for the instruction and edification of her children, are to give way to this blessed attraction, once it has been bestowed upon the soul.

Telling them how God watches over them she says :

Usually God draws to great renunciation those who earnestly seek to purify their hearts, and of such souls He takes peculiar care.

If, when the Church is keeping her great festivals, you should be drawn to the prayer of simplicity, let it not disquiet you that your mind is not occupied with the mystery of the day, for you must always follow your attraction. However, out of the time of prayer we may read or think about the festival, for, although we make but few considerations thereon, we feel within us certain sweet longings to be accordant with it, certain feelings of joy or the like. But, for prayer itself, the secret is always to follow the attraction vouchsafed us. Oh, my God, how many souls are ofttimes troubled about their prayer, doubting if they make it aright, and yet, to pray as He draws them is all God asks.

Of a truth, Daughters, it is a consolation without compare to surrender oneself absolutely to God and to be conscious that He sees and penetrates the most hidden secrets of our heart, and it is a good way of keeping oneself in His presence.

Yes, my Daughter, when you need light in important matters you should ask it of God, and if the light comes during prayer-time you may retain it without, however, ceasing to look at God ; It can be done, for example, in this way. Although I am looking at that sunbeam and keeping my eyes fixed upon it, I also see the floor

on each side of it, and yet I am only looking at the beam. Then, after prayer we simply put ourselves in the presence of God, humble ourselves before Him and seek again for the light He gave us.

Souls drawn to the prayer of simplicity should be most careful to curtail a certain eagerness which creates a desire to make and to multiply acts during the time of our prayer. It is pure self-love that breeds this hankering and it deprives us of simple attention and occupation to the presence of God.

A good practice of simplicity, much recommended by our Blessed Father, is to make but few reflections on the past, the future or even the present, but instead to ask counsel of God by raising our thoughts to Him, be it on our way to the parlour or for other matters of our charge. Our Lord taught me this practice long ago and I recommend it to you.

In our intercourse with Our Lord we should find all our delight, caring not whether it be His good pleasure to give us consolation or desolation. . . . This absolute dependence on and conformity to the will of God is the sum and root of perfection . . . the whole doctrine of our Blessed Father tends to perfect denudation of self. . . . We are all called to this perfection and to attain to it there is no need to weaken the body by penances and austerities. We are, therefore, without excuse if we fail to practise it. Indeed the absolute and complete surrender of our whole being to the will of God—the reposing in the care of His Providence is the greatest assurance of salvation we can have in this life. Repose is very easy, sweet, comfortable and pleasant, but to surrender ourselves without let or hindrance to His holy will is far higher, greater and more exalted, because it means perfect indifference to everything so long as it is the will of God. (*Entr.* xxxvi.)

On the Loss of self in God St. Jane says :

I see by what you say, my dear Sisters, that you wish to lose yourselves in God. To be lost in God is nothing else than to be absolutely and wholly resigned and given over into his hands, surrendered to the care of His adorable Providence. These words, *to be lost in God*, bear a certain significance which I think can only be understood by those who are thus happily lost.

The great St. Paul understood it well when he said : *I live now not I but Christ liveth in me.*[1] Oh, my Sisters, how happy should we be could we truly say : It is no more I who live in me because my whole life is lost in God. It is He who lives through me and in me. To live no longer in oneself, to be lost in God, is the most sublime perfection to which the soul can attain. Yet to this perfection we must all aspire, losing ourselves again and again a thousand times in the ocean of His infinite greatness. Now a soul thus lost is always reduced to a sense of annihilation before God. However God may treat her inwardly or outwardly she is content, nothing happens to her which does not give her satisfaction, she welcomes affliction, she looks upon it unmoved because she says : In me the consolation of being lost in God extinguishes all other consolations.

If told of the death of kinsfolk or of friends she appears undisturbed thereby, for she has already lost them in God. If a great humiliation comes upon her and her honour is questioned, ah, she makes no account of it because she has already wholly surrendered and lost herself in Him who constitutes her honour and her glory. There is nothing of which she can be deprived because there is nothing which she has not already voluntarily and willingly relinquished. I have a great admiration for holy Job who

[1] Gal. ii, 20.

on his dunghill, eaten by worms, said : *As it had pleased the Lord so is it done, blessed be the name of the Lord.*[1]

Now we desire to lose ourselves in God but at the same time we desire that this losing of ourselves may not entail much suffering. We tell our Lord indeed that we surrender ourselves into His divine arms, yet we have not done it the right way, for we want to have some little say in it ourselves, not perhaps, so much in temporal matters as in spiritual. Self-love, with its subtle finesse is ever persuading us that if we have no hand in it, all will not go well.

A soul completely *lost* in God has no wish for any virtue, any perfection, save only what God wishes her to have. She works hard to attain virtue because God so wishes but she leaves to Him the results of her labour and does not trouble to find new means of arriving at perfection ; she confines herself to make good use of those at hand, those put in her way by providence as occasions offer.

It is, my Sisters, quite true that although we may have given ourselves to God completely we may easily take ourselves back again. Now what are we to do in this case ? Humble ourselves genuinely and acknowledge that we are not so completely lost in God since we have been so prompt in finding ourselves again. Having made this act of profound humility we should again lose ourselves, casting ourselves into God as a little drop of water into the sea, and lose ourselves so securely in this ocean of Divine Goodness as never again to find ourselves.

Every time that you find you have thus taken yourself back, once again faithfully restore yourself to God and if you persevere loyally in this practice, I dare to promise you that you will with such a happy *loss*, lose yourself at last in God as never again to find yourself.

[1] Job i, 21.

It is easy to lose a thing we really want to lose and which we lose constantly without troubling to find it again. To such a loss we don't give a thought. Now if it is our earnest wish to lose ourselves, let us give no thought any longer to our hearts, our bodies, ourselves, nor to anything which is not God or for God. Ah, how I long to see my dearest Daughters thus *lost!* O God, how true are these words of our great St. Paul : *We must die with Jesus Christ if we wish to rise with Him.*[1] Put faith in Him and you will experience that He speaks the truth.

It is impossible to find true and solid virtue save in this death to self, to our inclinations, to our humours ; save in ranging ourselves under the standard of Our Lord's Cross. Yet, notwithstanding this divine warning, with what repugnance we suffer ! Oh, my Sisters, my dear Sisters, unless the grain of the finest wheat die it will bear no fruit. Eternal Truth Itself gives us this warning and it is well worthy of credence. The new Adam will not live in us if the old one be not destroyed. (*Entr.* xxxvii.)

At the conclusion of her next Conference speaking of the glory and happiness of the Religious life the Saint says :

What happiness, what honour for the soul, THE BRIDE OF THE SON OF GOD to follow her Spouse by the road whereon He has walked ! It is the true joy of the FAITHFUL SPOUSE to follow her Beloved, be it along the flowery garden of solace and delights, in the field of busy toil, or in the serene noontide repose on His sacred breast. Be it on the holy nuptial couch of sweet contemplation or on the hard, rugged, thorny, bitter mountain of Myrrh ; that is the dereliction, the darkness, the bitterness which are sometimes the portion of the best beloved of God. Happy shall

[1] 1 Cor. xv, 22.

we be, my dearest Daughters, if we keep ourselves firmly attached to the Bridegroom, never departing from the spot in His secret chamber where He has placed us to make us partakers of His Goodness and of all that is His. Let us seek no other pastime, no other joy, for assuredly apart from it we find only weariness, troubles, desolation and sorrow. (*Ibid.*, xxxviii.)

When visiting the Monastery of Autun the Sisters, among other questions, asked St. Jane Frances in what consisted the pure love of God, she replied :

Not in knowing what is right ; not in speaking of it, not in desiring it, not in experiencing great spiritual consolations, for many a one who is full of self-love and destitute of the love of God possesses all these things. No, true, pure love lies in doing always, as far as we have knowledge of it, the will of God, and in loyal fidelity to the observance of all we have vowed and promised, each according to her state.

Once this pure love takes hold of the soul, no longer caring for the things of earth, she cannot endure that any love foreign to it should share her heart. Divine love and self-love, grace and nature cannot live together, one or other must needs perish. So it is that those who follow their own inclinations are far, very far, from this purity of love.

Going on to speak of the means of acquiring perfection the Saint says : We ought to be ever on the look-out to lose no opportunity of annihilating ourselves, of embracing our own abjection. We ought so to love our contempt as to find it difficult to hold ourselves back from putting ourselves in the way of it. If we make good use thereof we are enriched and go forward towards the attainment of perfection.

Again in answer to another question :

You wish to know if we may ask of God to be delivered

from bodily infirmities, so as to serve Him better?

I say, No, because suffering is more agreeable to God than labour.

Once again asked by a Sister what she should do when during prayer a great desire to suffer for God came upon her, the Saint replies: When God gives such a desire, I tell you, my Daughter, we must hold ourselves in readiness to embrace whatever offers itself, however crucifying it may be, asking for nothing and refusing nothing.

We can do nothing more pleasing to God than surrender ourselves to Him, wholly resigned to whatever He sends. Let all your actions be for Him alone, let your intention be to accomplish His holy will in every way, this is the be-all and the end-all of your life; everything else ought to be contemptible in your eyes and the desire to render to God all you owe Him should never be absent one single moment from your mind nor your heart. (*Ibid.*, lxx.)

On fidelity to grace we have these words:

Holy Church, our Mother, defines that grace never fails us, never leaves us unless we leave it. Our good God waits patiently for us when we procrastinate, but if we go on indefinitely rejecting Him and will not receive Him, the Spirit of God departs, leaves us. Holy Scripture testifies to this in many places. When the Bridegroom had earnestly entreated His Spouse to open the door to Him and she continued making excuses, this sacred Lover passed on, and when again she was otherwise minded and opened to Him she found Him no more. My dear Sisters, when we feel urged to shake off some sin, to quit an imperfection, to acquire a virtue, to make rapid strides to the perfection of divine love, then the hour is come for us, let us arise in haste, let us run to the divine Spouse, accept

His grace, profit by His inspiration ; it is the hour of deliverance, let us not tarry, let us run, let us be swift-footed, otherwise we shall displease Him and He will go away. And that God would withdraw His inspirations would be for us the misfortune of misfortunes.

Oh, my Daughters, when by our negligence we cease to profit by these precious and divine inspirations we may justly fear that the propitious time will not return to us. *A time will come*, says our Lord, *when you shall seek Me and shall not find Me, you shall call and I will not answer.*[1] " And wherefore Lord ? " " Because when I sought you again and again, when I asked time after time for you, you hid from Me and would not answer Me. I have shown Myself to you and you had no desire to look upon me, now I will treat you in like manner."

Correspond, my Daughters, to these divine attractions no matter what the cost, for *Heaven suffereth violence and the violent beareth it away.*[2] (*Ibid.*, xxxix.)

In a Conference on a Chapter in the *Treatise of the Love of God* in which Saint Francis treats of ecstasy of the will, etc., St. Jane Frances says :

True virtues are true ecstasies. There is no illusion in humility, obedience, mortification ; in renunciation of our own will ; whereas frequently there is illusion in the ecstasy of the understanding and other extraordinary ways of prayer when they are not followed by the practice of virtue, showing by this that they are not from God but from the evil spirit who would deceive souls by his illusions. And again, it is sometimes ourselves who imagine of ourselves things that are not. Our Blessed Father used to say : " Those who keep themselves with simplicity in the presence

[1] John vii, 34.
[2] Matt. xi, 12.

of God repose upon His bosom while others in a diversity of ways are seeking Him," making this comparison of St. John who lovingly slept on Our Saviour's breast at the same table at which others were eating a variety of meats. And he added : " It is much better to sleep on this sacred pillow than to keep awake in any other posture."

All souls are not led in the same way but each according to the special attraction of God in her, there being a difference so great between these various ways of prayer that there are almost as many degrees of it as there are souls who practise it. The Holy Ghost operates in each according to the measure of His grace or the disposition of the soul, she allowing herself to be humbly led by God without venturing of her own initiative to undertake any special practice thereof. Those whom the Holy Spirit draws to such prayer are easily known by the fidelity with which they observe all that is of general custom in their Order, by the practice of virtue, more especially by the mortification of self-love ; of their own convenience and of their own will, for as St. Matthew tells us, Jesus Christ said : By their fruits ye shall know them, that is by their works. Think not then to call down the favours of God in holy prayer without mortification. (*Entr.* lxii.)

St. Jane Frances, one day, speaking to her Daughters of the admirable submission of Our Saviour, told them that when reading the Passion according to St. Matthew, she had remarked a manner of praying used by Our Lord and that doubtless they would like her to communicate her thought to them. Upon their expressing this desire, she said: The first time Our divine Master prayed in the Garden of Olives He said, *My Father, if it is possible let this chalice pass,*[1] in order

[1] Mark xiv, 36, and Luke xxii, 42.

to show us that when we are not as yet possessed of the necessary knowledge we may demand a thing without restriction, provided we add, *Thy will be done not mine.* But when Our Saviour returned for the second time He said, *Father if this chalice may not pass from Me unless I drink it,* FIAT. See what resignation! This is a prayer of perfect simplicity with God and, methought, it is thus that a person in great distress of mind tells his trusty friend that he has need of consolation and asks it of him. The friend, having alleged a few reasons, the person answers : If it may not be, if it cannot be done, SO BE IT. I only wish what is possible, whatever is for the best and what you deem fitting for me. Thus we lay before God both the human desire and the submission of mind.

How I delight in Our Saviour's answer, *Father not what I will but what Thou wilt.* As if this good Saviour had said : I wish with an ardent desire to die to save man, but I wish not to die by my own will but by Thine. O my Father, not as I will but as it shall please Thee, not my will but Thine.[1] (*Fragments d'Entretiens.*)

[1] *Traité de L'Amour de Dieu,* l, i, ch. xi, pp. 47. This and the twenty-first chapter clearly explain the distinction between the inferior and superior parts of the soul.

CHAPTER IV

Divers counsels on the difficulties to be expected in the practice of Prayer and the manner of dealing with them.

THE first advice for the soul who would pray, and is not vouchsafed any unusual attraction or elevation of the spirit to God, is to prepare herself diligently according to the saying of the wise man, *Before prayer prepare thy soul*, think where thou goest and to whom thou speakest.

Mental prayer is often badly made solely for want of due preparation ; this preparation is twofold, remote and immediate. Remote preparation consists in keeping the conscience in tranquillity, guarding the senses, in an ordinary perception of God and intimate inward converse with His divine Majesty. But more essential than all these ways is the emancipation of the soul from all immoderate affections and passions ; in a word, she should renounce every disturbing influence of mind or conscience that might hamper her inward liberty and recollection.

Mortification and prayer are the two wings of the dove by which she takes flight into holy solitude, there to find her repose with God, far from the haunts of men. As birds cannot soar on high with only one wing, neither should the soul persuade herself that she can rise aloft to God by mortification unless it be accompanied by prayer. Mortification without

prayer is useless toil, and prayer without mortification is like meat without salt, it soon corrupts. Hence must the soul provide herself with both wings if her flight is to be towards the courts of heaven where her heart ought to find its full content in converse with God.

We must, my Daughters, strip ourselves of all things, absolutely. We must bravely renounce every created thing by letting self-denial dominate our lives ; making ourselves master of our passions, trampling under foot their rebellion. Our own will must be subject to constraint ; our own judgment supple, willing, dependent on God in all that regards our inward life. Once the Holy Spirit has made Himself master of the soul the great method of prayer is to have none, for in her He then acts with a free hand and there is no longer need of rules and methods.

Prayer is the work of grace and not any contrivance of our own. Begin prayer by faith, remain in it by hope and come forth from it in that charity that only asks to do and suffer. In a word, the heart must be stripped bare and in all ways detached ; the soul, as far as her energies admit, naked in the sight of God with a complete submission of self to His designs, sometimes even making a formal act and a renewal of the resolution to this effect.

Fidelity of soul consists in being perfectly resigned to the will of God, in enduring whatever His goodness permits to happen to us, in doing all our spiritual exercises in love and for love, above all the exercise of prayer. Prayer is a pure elevation of our minds to God, believing that He is more in us than we are in ourselves. Our success in prayer depends on this and not on discourse and considerations, of which if we are deprived we need not trouble. Neither should we be troubled when we sleep at prayer, provided we resist

it. Let us patiently suffer it and keep ourselves before God as a statue to receive all He sends.[1] It gives Our Lord pleasure to see us fighting sleep all the time of prayer, we must bear with it and love our abjection.[2]

Prayer is a hidden manna, neither known nor valued save by those to whom it is given, and the more we taste it the more does our appetite for it grow. . . A soul who has this spirit of prayer does more work in one hour than another, who is without it, will do in many ; and her work done, she hastens to converse with her God, for this is her repose. But it is only to the obedient that God thus communicates Himself.

Careful examination of conscience is a practical method of prayer by which we get to know ourselves, to acquire humility, to purify our heart [3]—all important dispositions for familiar intercourse with God. At the end of prayer we should likewise examine our conscience.

The soul who keeps herself recollected throughout the day and is content with this, without desiring to make the prescribed mental prayer, will find it difficult to attain holiness.

No virtue is perfect that has not been tested by one's neighbour. Were he to hold our kinsfolk, our brethren in religion or other of our friends in dishonour we must

[1] *Cf* St. F. de Sales, *Oeuvres iv, Traitté de L'Amour de Dieu*, l,vi ch. xi.

[2] There is no harm in sitting down for part of the time of prayer when necessity requires, but not for the whole time. We must not be so tender of ourselves ; it is dangerous and very harmful to our spiritual welfare. *Oeuvres*, t. iii, p. 525.

[3] In writing to a Religious, St. Francis warns her against anxiety on this point. This examination [of conscience] he says, when it is made with anxiety and perplexity, is nothing but loss of time and those who make it are like soldiers who prepare themselves for battle by going to excess in the practice of tournaments and such things, with the result that when the time for fighting in good earnest comes they find themselves worn out and unfit. The mind is fatigued by this constant searching and when the time for acting comes it can do no more. This is my first commandment to you. *Lettre à Sœur Soulfour*, t. xii, pp. 167-168.

simply suffer the reproach ; and the afflictions of the divine service such as aridities, distractions, obscurity, pusillanimity, scruples, temptations, persecutions of the devil, trials caused by confessors, by ministers of God, we must bear without murmur, because they are God's good pleasure. Those who persevere in the endurance of them will, at last,be admitted to the surpassing sweetness of the intimate ways of the prayer of union with God, and then they are amply rewarded.

From some God holds back these favours either because they are a prey to vices, each one of which is a dark cloud shutting out from the soul the sight of the Creator, or, the better to make them understand the excellence of what they seek, by the long-drawn-out time that has to be devoted to its attainment.

Meanwhile God proves the soul in many ways both by inward and outward trials, and so experiencing how dearly it costs, we learn to value the great prize for which we run.

In prayer we should freely unburden ourselves to God, telling Him, our Lord and Master, in the most familiar and confidential way everything, great and small, of heaven or of earth, much or little ; opening our heart and pouring it all out to Him without reserves, recounting its burdens, its sins, its aspirations ; revealing our whole self, seeking repose in His company as with a friend on whom one relies and to whom one makes known alike the good and the bad. This is what holy Scripture calls *pouring out his heart like water in the divine presence*,[1] manifesting not only what is of importance but the least thing.

Seeing that divine Providence governs all and that we can do nothing without its aid, it is wise to confer with God, for whatever good comes to us in any way it comes from Him.

[1] Pour out thy heart like water before the face of the Lord.—Lam. ii, 1

Let there be no timidity in our supplications ; He does not like it.

We ought to give more consideration, more thought to our spiritual exercises thus to gain light how, with more profit to our souls, to practise especially, the exercise of prayer, of the presence of God, the recital of the office, spiritual reading, the general and particular examination of conscience.

We should reflect how most effectually to combat a vice and acquire a virtue, to obtain contrition of heart; the full fruit of our confessions, and alacrity in performing all the penances in our power.

We must examine our manner of preparing for Communion, sacramental and spiritual ; of guarding the senses and mortifying the movements of nature : as in our comportment at table, at recreation, in the parlour.

And think seriously how best to acquire humility, self-knowledge, the love of God, charity in bearing with one another and in avoiding rash judgments.

We ought to look into our ways of practising Povery, Chastity, Obedience, and observance of Rule. Are we indifferent to all things by abandonment ?

What is our interpretation of the three companions of Jesus Christ, povery, contempt, and pain, and our practice of them ? In a word ; are we making spiritual progress and acquiring distrust of our own strength and perseverant hope in the assistance of Our Lord ?[1] Having done all this to the best of our power let us expect all from God through the mertits and good works of the Just.

Prayer is one of the most efficacious means of glorifying God ; but St. Gregory teaches us that there are

[1] For further details of this comprehensive examination of conscience see *Œuvres*, III, p. 53.

temperaments so restless that they are incapable of the repose necessary for mental prayer. These must be first taught to practise the virtues, vocal prayer and other devotions, until, little by little they learn to subdue their nature, and later, by these means, somewhat fit themselves for prayer. God gives devotion to those who sincerely plead with Him for the grace of contrition, and to those who conquer their temptations and passions He will give the hidden manna.

In prayer we should interrogate our hearts as to whether or no we posses the virtue or the vice upon which we meditate ; or if the Passion of Jesus Christ be the subject of our meditation, let us say to Our Lord : What fear or what interest induced Thee to endure such cruel torments ? And straightway He will answer : Not fear, because I am omnipotent, not interest, because I am God. It was My love for thee alone that impelled Me.

At this word, love, the soul will stay her questioning because it will awaken love within her own heart until she is drawn and impelled to manifest that for love of Him she will suffer oblivion, contempt, bitterness and the like hard things repugnant to nature.

Now to meditate with profit we must be mindful to ponder and weigh [the cost of] the reformation of our manners, thinking how we can best conform our actions to those which Jesus Christ has done and suffered. . . The highest science of prayer and the greatest profit lies in suffering and humiliating ourselves rather than in feeling relish and consolations. To be faithful in the resolve to do violence to ourselves we must be thorough.

When the love of created things tries to draw away the mind and makes us disobedient to the divine Majesty, the great, divine love within the soul takes

the lead as another St. Michael and captures its powers and senses for the service of God by the intrepid words, *Who is like unto God?*

This love of God should be the motive power of all, wide in its expansion, surpassing all other loves, conquering all difficulties, making choice of the honour and the good pleasure of God supremely, above all else; absolutely, with no reservation.

O true God! How often for the satisfaction of trifles, illusions, vain and unsubstantial things do we forsake the love of our heavenly Spouse! How then can we say that we love Him above all things when we prefer such inane vanities to His grace? *They have forsaken Me*, said God, *I who am the fountain of living water, and have digged to themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.*[1] It is then for love of us that He wishes we should love Him, because we cannot cease to love Him without a loss to ourselves, and by every affection that we take away from Him we lose Him.

Believe me, my Daughters, we must bring to prayer all the tranquillity of heart we can possibly command and shut ourselves up in the little heaven that is within us, shutting out all objects of sense and firmly believing that we shall not fail *to drink of the water from the cistern.*[2]

The hour of prayer having come, the soul who with holy impatience awaits that happy moment ought straightway to answer the signal and hasten to receive the honour about to be conferred upon her. She should then invoke the Holy Spirit, the Blessed Virgin, her good Angel and such Saints as she may choose to help her in her prayer and to remain with her while she is before God. She should gather together all her powers and say to herself: My soul, you are about to

[1] Jer. ii, 13.
[2] Isa. xxxvi, 16.

appear before God to hold converse with Him—a truce to all else.

To enter into the presence of God let us sometimes represent Him to ourselves as filling the whole universe, thinking of Him as omnipresent like the air we breathe. Again, we may look upon God as surrounding us on every side, we being in Him as fish are in the sea, birds in the air. Or we may withdraw into our inward selves and then with a calm, unwavering gaze look upon the Divine Essence as filling our soul and our very being ; even as the Father, contemplating Himself in His own being, generates the divine Son from whom, with Him, proceeds the Holy Ghost. We may, at other times, fix our thoughts upon Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, and reflect, as faith teaches us, that in it Our Lord in His Sacred Humanity abides, and that this same Humanity is seated on the right hand of the Eternal Father. And lastly we must ever humble ourselves and acknowledge that we are unworthy to speak to God, saying with Abraham : *I will speak to my Lord whereas I am but dust and ashes.*[1]

We should end our prayer by three acts : Thanksgiving, oblation and petition ; this last to ask God's help that we may carry out the good resolves that we have made. Let us then gather a little bouquet of devotion from the principal affections we have had, so that it may cast its fragrance over the whole day.[2]

[1] Gen. xviii, 27.

[2] One of his means of giving a prominent place throughout the day to the resolution of the morning was the Spiritual Bouquet which St. Francis instituted. This marvellous discovery was in harmony with his artistic and poetic genius. The spiritual bouquet which crowns the Salesian prayer, like ejaculatory prayer, has for end the maintaining of the soul throughout the day in the atmosphere of fervour, in the warmth of the affections so necessary to perpetuate and to fertilise the resolutions to which it gave birth at the morning prayer.—Vincent. *S. François de Sales, Directeur d'Ames,* pp. 341-2.—G. Beauchesne, Editeur. Rue de Rennes 117. Paris, 1925.

The holy Bishop introduces his " little nosegay of devotion " in words

If during prayer the soul feels the touch of God, by which He lets her know that He wishes to communicate with her, she should at once cease from all efforts and await His coming, nor hinder it by making acts (now out of place) preparing in inward silence to receive Him. She may, however, at times upon feeling His approach say, *Speak Lord, thy servant heareth*,[1] and then with tranquillity open wide her heart and yield it up to the infusion of grace, which afterwards she must turn to good account according to the impulse received in prayer.

Let us tie ourselves down to prayer and never quit it, for in this game (so to say) he is the loser who gives up his prayer. If it seems to you that you are not heard, cry out the louder, if you be driven out by one door, come in by another ; if you hear the words said to the Canaanitish woman, that you do not deserve the graces for which you ask, humbly reply that like her you too do not aspire to unusual favours, but only to eat the crumbs that fall from the divine table.

As God is in an infinitely exalted sphere, if the soul is to attain to Him she must tend upwards. The Spouse in the Canticles speaking of His Bride occupied in prayer compares her to a column of smoke rising towards heaven, nothing, as she ascends, being able to impede her progress.

Let us realise, dear Daughters, the honour that is ours in being at liberty to pray as frequently and as

such as these: We do not willingly leave a beautiful garden without taking away with us a few flowers to inhale their perfume and carry them about during the day ; even so we should choose one or two or three points in which we have found relish when meditating upon some mystery, to inhale their spiritual perfume throughout the day, points that we find specially proper for our advancement in perfection. *Cf Oeuvres de S. François de Sales*, t. iii. *Introduction à la Vie Devote, 2me partie*, ch. vii, p. 83.

[1] 1 Kings iii, 9.

secretly as we will. Unless we pray from the heart it is not prayer at all, but if we pray from the heart we shall never want for anything.

We need not wonder at seeing those who give themselves up to prayer make but small account of earthly things, because being with God they look down from so great a height that they all but lose sight of terrestrial objects.

St. John Climacus tells us that prayer is the salvation of the world, the office of the angels, the source of grace and the most noble possession of man ; meaning thereby that possessing so great a good all else is indifferent to him. It matters little what God works in the soul because she ought not to be attached to the work of God in her but to the God who works. Having learnt from our Lord to enter into herself and to yearn for His presence in her heart, she might, I bethink me, choose rather to endure for a time the pains of hell than return to the pleasures, or, to speak more accurately, to the ennui, the weariness of the world. The more we empty ourselves of all that is not God the more does He fill us with Himself. Let us then give up the thought of self that He may take upon Himself the care of us.

The soul has attained the silence of the mystic when she no longer speaks to creatures, nor even to God, but with profound inward attention simply listens to Him. This silence honours Him in a very sublime manner and by diverting her attention from creatures (thus enabling her freely to apply herself to God, the one source of her purity) it becomes the means of untold good to the soul. We read in Holy Scripture : *Hearken O Israel and be still.*[1] Let us then be silent with creatures and hearken to God. One word from Him to us is worth ten thousand from us to Him.

[1] Attend and hear O Israel.—Deut. xxvii, 9.

He communicates Himself spiritually, reaching by His inspirations the deepest depths of the heart, uniting Himself to us in an ineffably gentle manner. But all is summed up in this: Whoso delivers Himself over to God becomes one same spirit with God.

Drown yourself in this ocean of sanctity, of infinite purity, for in such depths he who is lost is the winner. Take my word for it. Daughters dear, the divine Heart will never fail us if we do not fail Him, and even if we do, not even then will He fail us because His loyalty far outweighs our disloyalty. He is not like those who break faith with Him, for we shall ever find Him willing to say to us: *Return, O Sulamitess, return.*[1]

Let us humble ourselves before the greatness of God, annihilate ourselves before His adorable incomprehensibility, lose ourselves for good and all in the abyss of His Divinity. If we could say in truth these words, *My God Thou art my all*[2] we should no longer ever feel weariness in prayer, for worn out though we might, be these words said from the heart would charm away all ennui. David said: *The Lord hath heard the desire of the poor.*[3] So in order to prepare well we need but say: *All my desire is before Thee and my sighs are not hidden from Thee.*[4]

St. Bonaventure gives us this counsel for prayer: "When thou desirest that God should yield to thee, bear within thy heart the wounds of Jesus Crucified."

There is a prayer of tranquil attention of the soul to God which tends to moderate the too great activity of her faculties and creates an inward silence and repose. Ah, how much better it would ofttimes be

[1] Cant. vi, 13.
[2] Ps. lxxii, 25.
[3] Ps. ix, 17.
[4] Ps. xxxvii, 10.

to listen to God deep down in our heart than to speak to Him with our lips.

Then there is a prayer wherein the soul is calm and tranquil, making no acts yet, nevertheless, is she ready to embrace whatever God may will to do with her, and this love of the will of God is the food of the soul. Again, we have the prayer in which the soul applies herself to God with all her faculties and yet can render to herself no account of how she is occupied. And yet again, there is the prayer of combat and strife made under the pressure of some continuous and violent temptation. Such prayer demands great fidelity to God and a quiet, simple diversion of thought from the subject of pain.

The dryness we experience in prayer has no other source than a defective love of God, for the soul that loves easily occupies herself with the object of her love. If the mind can say nothing let the heart speak. Though we had nothing else to say to God than to tell Him that we love Him and that He is worthy of love, that is enough. The angels in heaven utter but one word, *Sanctus*. In the abode of bliss that is their whole, their solitary prayer. God is both light and darkness to each one as He sees fit. If He be darkness to you seek not for aught else. There is more reverence in humbly abasing oneself in the presence of a mystery than in lifting oneself up to contemplate it with the intellect.

Faith is the light of the new spiritual world ; it is the science of the Saints. In prayer then, we should listen rather than speak. It is more fitting to hearken to the Son of God than to address Him, we, who are not worthy to speak in His presence. Let us leave to Him the choice of the discourse, nor seek for words within ourselves. But only to the recollected soul does he communicate Himself.

Should you then, you ask, remain idle and unoccupied in prayer? No, my Daughter, we must subject our mind to the Holy Spirit who wishes to be its light and its guide. Were you able to do naught else save remain in the presence of God and consume your life before Him as a taper consumes and burns itself out before the Blessed Sacrament would you not be only too happy?

To be little in His sight is not enough, we must be *nothing*—this is the foundation upon which He would build, because it pleases Him to work on nothingness. The greater our annihilation the loftier the building He erects thereon. When you are at prayer you must neither see nor hear aught but God; even were an angel to present himself before you you should take no heed of him for you are speaking to God who is greater than he.

Prove to God that you love Him not for His rewards but for Himself.

If seeing us utterly destitute of all created things allures God to come to our help, will He not be still more willing to succour us when it is He Himself who has deprived us of His sensible presence? Well then what matters it if we seem to be forsaken by God provided that we are heard by Him? Great should be our joy when for love of Him we are cut off from all that is in heaven or earth and even from Himself for love of Himself; then can we say, *What have I in heaven and what do I desire on earth besides Thee O my God?*[1] (*Oeuvres*, t, iii pp. 259-268. and 524-532.)

God weans the souls that are His, first, from the pleasure received from the senses; second, from the lights of reason; third, from the help they receive from persons of piety; fourth, from sensible devotion;

[1] Ps. lxxii, 25.

fifth, and lastly, God permits these souls, dear to His Heart to fall into states in which it seems to them they are wholly deprived of peace and trust in Him. Then it is that those beloved of God find nothing but bitterness in outward things. Reason, with all its stratagems, serves only to augment their troubles, human aid appears to them of no avail and inward peace fails them at the time they think they most require it. To be in these straits is very profitable to the soul, to the end that being absolutely destitute and cast adrift from all created helps God may be its light, its life, its pleasure, its relief, its vesture, its repose, its all. Loving submission to the will of God in inward sufferings is a greater help in furthering a more intimate union [with Him] than is the solace of relieving ourselves by speaking of our trouble.[1] (*Fragments d'Entretiens*, t. ii.)

And in a letter to Sister Bonne-Marie de Haraucount, St. Jane says :

. . . To return to yourself whom I so dearly love. Abide in peace in your state of utter denudation. Blessed are the poor for God will reclothe them. Oh, how happy should we be if our hearts were stripped bare of all that is not God and how we should love this poverty and despoliation ! To be in darkness, no flavour in our lives, no good sentiments, deprived of all spiritual enlightenment, all help, all satisfaction, no friend to whom we can turn ; how desirable is this state ! O my Daughter, when the soul finds herself come to this pass, what is left to her but to do as the little unfledged bird that hides itself and cuddles under the wings of good mother Providence, not venturing

[1] *Cf St. John of the Cross*, Lewis's translation. *The Ascent of Mt. Carmel*, Book ii, ch. vii, vol. i. The whole of this chapter is illuminating and instructive for such souls as are called to follow Christ in complete detachment.

to come out of cover for fear of being captured by the kite? Such is the refuge where you now find shelter. What is there then to fear? How could you be better off, with what richer vesture could you be clothed than the shelter of the most sweet and paternal providence of your heavenly Father? Abide as you are, quite content in the possession of this unique treasure. You know you are in my heart and none can ever displace you. (*Oeuvres.* t. vii, *lettre* mcclxviii.)

To Sister Marie Susanne Duret she writes:

Your letter is a great consolation to me. When God deigns to speak to a soul all creatures must cease to do so. And this favour I see is yours through the divine mercy. You must adhere to this practice of looking at God within you and it will absorb all others. Let Him act accordingly to His good pleasure so that whether He give you sweet or bitter, satisfaction or dissatisfaction, it may be all one to you. Give little thought to either, but only to Him, following faithfully and simply the light He will give you for your good in each event. Let Him act and you will see how He will strip you of everything till there is nothing that you care for save intercourse with Him. May His divine goodness keep you in this way, even unto the utmost perfection of His holy love. Be joyous and brave, I beg of you, and you will experience how sweet God is. Pray for me. (*Ibid.*, *lettre* mdlxxviii.)

Extracts from divers degrees of prayer, conditions required for progress therein.

My dear Daughters, we of ourselves do not know how to take one step forward in the holy science of prayer. So it is that the sacred Spouse cries out in her impotency, *Draw me*, that is to say, take the first step, for I cannot of my self arise but when Thou shalt have

aroused me, then, O dear Spouse of my soul, we will run. Thou wilt run before me, alluring me always on and on, and I, I will follow Thee in the race, yielding to Thy attractions. Such is the way in which Thou wilt draw me by the odour of Thy perfumes.[1]

When we have no desire to make reparation for our sins by doing penance, it is a sign that we have not true sorrow for them. Ejaculatory prayers or a cry for mercy lifts up the soul to God and reuniting her to His goodness of a surety obtains her pardon, in virtue of the holy love that inspired this sacred movement. So we should make ourselves pray the prayer of repentance pouring out our souls before the pitying heart of our Saviour who will receive them in mercy.

We fall because we allow ourselves to be befooled by our self-esteem, we make returns on self, we beguile our minds with creatures ; such minds are despicable, idle, given to surface pleasures ; so little dread have they of venial sin that they fall and are ofttimes taken unawares by mortal sin. Now when charity is severed from the soul there still remains the habit of virtuous actions which have the appearance of charity and may deceive us, but such actions are performed without virtue, without election, and are but phantoms of virtue.

We cannot express, my dear Daughters, the Saviour's longing desire to come back to our souls. *Open to me*, He says, *My Sister, My love, My dove, My undefiled, for My head is full of dew and my locks of the drops of the night.*[2] Ah ! the divine Lover would say to our souls : I am weighed down with the sufferings and sweat of My Passion, open then thy heart to Me and I will let fall into it the dew of My Passion which will be converted into pearls of consolation. The true lover has nigh

[1] Cant. i, 3.
[2] Cant. v, 2.

unto no pleasure save in the object beloved. Therefore did all things seem like dross and mire to the glorious St. Paul in comparison to his Saviour, and so is it with the sacred Spouse; she gives herself wholly to her Beloved and to Him alone. *My Beloved is mine and I am His.*[1] Should creatures, however excellent, come in her way, nay, even be they angels she tarries not with them or only in so far as they can help her to find Him whom she seeks. *Tell me, I adjure you, have you seen Him whom my soul loveth.*[2]

O God, if we saw Him as He is, we should die of love for Him. If we saw His divine heart as He sings the canticle in praise of the Divinity with a voice of infinite sweetness, our hearts would well nigh burst with joy. He invites us, this dear friend of our souls. *Arise,* He says, *come out of thyself, take wing towards Me, my love, my dove, my beautiful one.*[3] Come into this celestial abode where all is joy, where all breathe only praise and benediction, where all comes to flower and sheds around sweetness and perfume. Come, my beloved, my dearest, and that you may see Me more clearly come to the window through which I can look upon thee, come, consider My Heart in the cavern in the opening of My Side, come and show Me thy face. Ah! Now I see it though thou knowest it not, but then I shall see it and thou shalt show it to me for thou shalt see that I see it. Let me hear thy voice, for I wish to incorporate it with Mine. So will thy face be comely and thy voice pleasant and sweet.[4]

[1] *Ibid.*, ii, 16.—My beloved to me and I to him.

[2] Cant. iii, 3.

[3] Arise, make haste, my love, my dove, my beautiful one, and come.—*Ibid.*, ii, 10.

[4] *Ibid.*, ii, 12-14. The flowers have appeared in our land; the time of pruning is come: the voice of the turtle is heard in our land, the fig tree hath put forth her green figs: the vines in flower yield their sweet odour. Arise my love, my beautiful one and come. My dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hollow places of the wall. Shew me thy face, let thy voice sounds in my ears for thy voice is sweet and thy face comely.

Meditation is simply an attentive thought reiterated and deliberately entertained in order to excite the will to holy and salutary affections and resolves. The Sacred Spouse says : *The voice of the turtle is heard in our land.* By this He means that a devout soul is very agreeable to Him when she presents herself before Him and meditates in order within herself to feed the holy love of Him. In this sense the Apostle said : *Think diligently upon Him that endured such opposition from sinners against Himself that you be not wearied, fainting in your minds.*[1]

So we meditate to concentrate our love of God and having concentrated it we contemplate God and think on His goodness because of the sweetness that love makes us find therein.

Oh, how happy are those who with an ever-abiding, wondering admiration utter within themselves these loving words of the great St. Augustine. O Beauty ever ancient, ever new : and those of David : *Thou art good and in Thy goodness teach me Thy justifications.*[2] *How sweet are Thy words to my palate ! More than honey to my mouth :*[3] or with St. Thomas *: My Lord and my God:* or with Magdalen; *Rabboni.* To be inebriated is to be so in love with the thought of His beauty and so united to His goodness from constant and ardent contemplation thereon as to be carried out of oneself.

A bundle of myrrh is my Beloved to me. He shall abide between my breasts. My Beloved to me and I to Him who feedeth among the lilies till the day break and the shadows retire.[4]

[1] Heb. xii, 3.
[2] Ps. cxviii, 68.
[3] Ps. cxviii, 103.
[4] Cant. ii, 16, 17.

Show me O thou whom my soul loveth where thou reposeth, where thou liest in the mid-day.[1]

See how the holy Sulamitess contents herself with knowing that her Beloved is with her. Oh, verily to be and to wish to be always, for ever and ever, pleasing to God is a good method of keeping one's self in His presence. Now this state of quiet in which the will only acts by a simple acquiescence in the divine good pleasure, wishing, in prayer, no aim other than that of being simply in God's presence in whatever manner He wills, this is quietude of a supremely excellent character, for it is purified of every interest; the faculties of the soul, nay, even the will, taking contentment in nothing, if not in being without contentment for the sake of God's contentment; for His good pleasure is her repose. It is the height of loving ecstasy to have the will in the contentment of God and in no way in her own.

My soul, said the sacred Lover, *melted when my Beloved spoke to me*,[2] and what is *to be melted* if not that it be no longer contained in itself but flows out towards its divine Lover?

Sometimes the wound of love is made by the one thought that there was a time when we were without love of God. "Oh, too late have I loved thee, Beauty ever ancient and ever new."[3] Such a recollection of the past is a present, living pain to one who now loves the sovereign Goodness.

In prayer it is by frequent little loving ejaculations that we unite ourselves to God. O sweet Jesus, draw me always deeper and deeper into Thy Heart, that buried there in Thy love I may be wholly swallowed up in Thy sweetness. If the human heart energises itself with strength in prayer it transplants itself by

[1] Cant. i, 6.
[2] Cant. v, 6.
[3] St. Augustine.

heavenly love from this world to God, and it will assuredly never cease to stretch forth and bind itself fast to the Divinity, uniting closer and closer to His goodness, yet by a growth that is all unperceived until it be accomplished. Oh, how happy is the soul that in tranquillity of heart, lovingly maintains this holy sentiment of the presence of God ! Such a union will perpetually, though insensibly, increase until the spirit is steeped in infinite suavity !

Now when I speak as I do here of the holy sentiment of the presence of God I do not mean a sensible presence but of that which resides in the highest or supreme point of the spirit, where divine love reigns and chiefly operates. To this union the divine Shepherd of souls provokes His dear Sulamitess. *Put me*, He says, *as a seal upon thy heart as a seal upon thy arm*.[1] Thus does He wish our union with Him to be so strong, so close that we bear its mark upon us. Ah, Jesus, who will give me the grace that my spirit may be one with thine ! Lord, rejecting the multiplicity of created things I desire only union with Thee. Thou art the sole object, the solitary unity essential to my soul ! . . . .

Swallow up this atom of being that Thou hast given me in the sea of Thy goodness from whence it hath come forth. Ah, Lord since Thy heart loves mine and I long for Thee to ravish it from me, why dost Thou not take it ? Draw me and I will run, allured by Thy attractions, to cast myself into Thy Fatherly arms never to stir from them, to stay there for ever and ever. Amen.

Our heart is made for God who continually entices it and does not cease pouring into it the *attrait* of His heavenly love, but there are five things that impede the energising of this holy attraction : sin, the love

[1] Cant. vii, 6.

of riches, sensual pleasures, pride and vanity, self-love with its multitude of unruly passions, a burden under which we succumb. Whoever truly takes pleasure in God desires to please Him and to do this, faithfully conforms himself to Him. Verily, the delight of the good God is to be with the children of men, to pour out His graces upon them. O Goodness infinitely sweet, how lovable is Thy will, how desirable are Thy favours! Thou hast created me for eternal life. Thy sacred breasts are enkindled with a love that admits of no comparison, they abound with the milk of mercy, be it to pardon the penitent or to perfect the just. Ah, why then doth not our will cling to Thine to drink in the milk of eternal benediction as the infant with tenacity suckles at his mother's breast? That it may do so we must make up our minds to will and to welcome the befitting means for its accomplishment and make special resolution thereon. For this David accepted commensurate penance; as for me I ought to accept abjections, but when we love they are a joy to us.

When charity leads some to a life of poverty, others to shut themselves up in cloisters, no one has a right to demand its reasons. If its actions are called in question it answers boldly: It is because the *Lord hath need of them*.[1] All should be at the service of charity but she is at the service of no one, not even of her Beloved for she is not His servant but His spouse, since it is not service but love she renders Him. . . O Lord, let me never offend Thee in anything, grant that my will may never be other than Thy will.

Great souls do everything that they see to be pleasing to God. *My soul melted away when my Beloved spoke*.[2] Do then what the Lord counsels you. Prevent

[1] Matt. xxi, 3.
[2] Cant. v. 6.

in charity those who have offended you. The souls who are prompt in following the divine inspirations are those whom the Eternal Father has prepared to be the spouses of His Beloved Son. We must go where inspiration urges us, without flinching. Having found the will of God in our vocation we remain lovingly in the practice thereof. A good mark of a true inspiration, and more especially of an extraordinary inspiration, is tranquillity of heart. Peace is inseparable from most holy humility, I speak of a humility that is noble, real, that reaches to the very marrow, is solid, supple to correction, pliable and prompt to obedience, in a word, the three best marks of a legitimate inspiration are: perseverance against inconstancy and levity, suavity of heart against anxiety and over-eagerness, humble obedience against obstinacy and capriciousness.

In order to find out what is sound in a matter of inspiration we should get the advice of a wise spiritual Father and if he fails, consult two or three spiritual persons, then resolve, and in the name of God adhere to your resolve, taking heed to progress in it and to act up to it perseverantly.

Although difficulties, temptations and the vicissitudes of events meet us in our progress we must hold to our decision nor let them affect it, considering that had we made another choice we should perhaps find it a hundred times worse. The resolution being taken with a devout mind we must no longer doubt the holiness of carrying it out. If we persevere in it it will never fail us; to do otherwise is a mark of great self-love or of childishness and puerility of mind.

God, ofttimes, to exercise us in holy indifference, inspires us with great projects in which, however, He does not wish us to succeed, and then as we ought

boldly, courageously and perseveringly to begin and to continue the work as long as we are able, so must we gently and tranquilly acquiesce in the issue of the enterprise whatever it may please God that it should be. Oh, how blessed are such souls, valiant and strong in undertaking the enterprise with which God inspires them, gentle and supple in laying it down when God so wills. Such are the marks of a very perfect indifference. We, on the contrary, wish that whatever we have undertaken should succeed, yet it is not reasonable to expect that God should do everything to our liking.[1]

Let us not be uneasy, my dear Daughters, at seeing ourselves always novices in the exercise of virtues for in a monastery of the devout life each one always looks upon herself as a novice and all life therein is destined for probation. There is no more evident mark of being, not even a novice, nay worthy rather of expulsion and reprobation than to think or hold ourselves as professed. The obligation of serving God and of making progress in His love lasts unremittingly till death.

God wills that we should have spiritual enemies and He wills that we should resist them; betwixt these two divine wills let us live courageously. We should suffer assaults with patience and valiantly strive to withstand them. He who when praying is conscious that he prays is not perfectly attentive to his prayer,

[1] In two letters to M. Noel Brulart (Commander de Sillery) at a time when, owing to strong opposition, he was forced to abandon a work of far-reaching charity, St. Jane writes: "Not to feel the loss of so much spiritual good as might be expected from such an undertaking would be impossible."—*Lettre* mdcxx. "Our Blessed Father used to say that we should with firm courage and a long-breath, without ever growing slack, pursue the good works committed to us by God so long as we see His holy will in them. But he said also that we should, if such were God's good pleasure, cease the pursuit, nay, even, if it did not succeed, sweetly and tranquilly abandon it altogether."—*Lettre*, mdlxx. *Oeuvres*, t. viii, vol. v.

for he diverts his attention from God to whom He is praying to think of the prayer he is addressing to Him. Even the care we take to avoid distractions often serves as the greatest distraction. Simplicity in spiritual actions is highly commendable. If you turn your eyes upon yourself it is no longer God whom you regard but your own attitude with regard to Him. Fervent prayer makes no return on self, it is occupied with God alone. Such is the ardour of holy love.

When the tumult of spiritual troubles deprives us of every other kind of alleviation and every means of resistance, let us recommend our spirit to the care of Jesus Christ who is our true Father, and bowing the head of our acquiescence to His good pleasure consign to Him our whole will. We must faithfully employ our time, like unto Job, in blessing Him for all He doeth. How admirable is this occupation of our will when it leaves the care of willing and choosing—the disposal of all things to God, with praise and thanksgiving for every issue. Often say : My Father loves me truly and I, I am all His.

When love enters into a soul it makes it happily die to self to live again to God, for it despoils it of all natural desires and of that esteem of self which clings as closely to the spirit as the skin does to the flesh. Then God strips it of the most laudable affections, such as those it had to spiritual consolations, to exercises of piety, to the perfection of virtues which seemed to be the very life of the devout soul.[1]

Yes ; the same Lord who in the beginning gave us the desire for the attainments of virtues and made us practise them on every occasion, He it is who now takes from us all such affections, that with the greater

[1] *Cf St. John of the Cross. Obscure night*, b. ii, ch. iii, p. 378. Lewis's translation.

tranquillity, purity and simplicity we may have no loving desire for anything save His divine Majesty's sweet will.

With peace of mind, with calm serenity, we ought to see ourselves reclothed once more in our misery and abjection, therein to abide in the midst of our imperfections and feebleness until God exalts us to the practice of more excellent virtues. He who leaves all for God should take back nothing except such as God wills him to have again. He no longer nourishes his body save to serve the spirit as God wishes, he no longer studies save to serve his neighbour and his own soul according to the divine intention. He no longer practises virtues because they are to his liking but because God desires it ; thus must we denude ourselves of all affections, little and great, and often examine our heart to see if it is ready to strip itself, as Isaias said : then again, to reclothe itself in due time with affections befitting the service of Charity. In a word, to die on the cross all naked with our divine Saviour and to arise afterwards a new man with Him. When we think of our neighbour created to the image and likeness of God we ought to say to one another : Look, see this creature, how she resembles her Creator. Should we not embrace her, caress and be full of affection for her, call down upon her a thousand blessings ? But why all this ? For the love of her ? Ah, not for the love of her, because we know not if she be in herself worthy of love or hatred. Then why ? Oh, for the love of God who has created her to His own image and thereby renders her capable of participating in His goodness, His grace and glory. For love of God, I say, by whom she is, to whom she is, through whom she is, in whom she is and for whom she is ; to whom she has a resemblance in a unique manner. This is why divine love so often not only commands the love of our neighbour

but creates that love and diffuses it in the human heart, because of this resemblance, and he in whom this love is diffused would willingly die to save his neighbour from perishing. True zeal has a glowing ardour but it is constant, firm, sweet, laborious, equally lovable and indefatigable. All otherwise is false zeal, it is turbulent, disordered, insolent, proud, short-lived, angry, equally impetuous and inconstant. *Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation.*[1] Our Lord shows by these words that if He did not guard our souls in time of temptation in vain should those who watch guard them.

Of all virtuous actions we ought most carefully to practise those of religion and reverence toward divine things, those of faith, of hope and of most holy fear of God. We should often speak of heavenly things, thinking of and longing after eternity, frequenting churches and the divine services, reading devout books, observing the ceremonies of religion, for all these exercises feed the desire of holy love and diffuse its graces more abundantly.

Delection[2] reinforces and reinvigorates itself to bear life-giving fruits by the practice of all virtues, It is insatiable in its desire for spiritual offspring ; with Rachael it says, *Give me children or I shall die.* —Gen. xxx, i. (*Oeuvres*, t. iii, pp. 533-543.)

[1] Luke xii, 46.

[2] The Saint here uses the word "delection" instead of "love." *Cf Traité de l'Amour de Dieu*, t. iv, l.i, ch. xiii et xiv, on the distinction between these two loves.

CHAPTER V

ON THE DIFFERENT FORMS OF PASSIVE PRAYER.

SECTION I

The Prayer of Quietude

Questions written to the Saint and her Answers on the Prayer of Quietude.[1]

QUESTION. When the soul is suffering from fear of God how can she keep herself in this unique regard? Fear seems so opposed to the path prescribed for her and to which she wishes to keep but to which she cannot. The powers of her imagination are too vagabond, and even the senses contribute to her distraction, her hearing being sensitive to the least disturbance.

ANSWER. My dear Daughter, I will now answer you as Our Lord inspires me. First: I believe that in whatever disposition the soul finds herself, be it that of fear or any other, she should remain firm and constant in this simple regard [this looking unto Jesus]. Though deprived of both perception and feeling she still has faith which is a warrant to her of the absolute presence of God. In this presence she

[1] Taken from an old manuscript of the contemporaries of the Saint preserved in the Archives of the First Monastery of Annecy.

should abide with peace and submission and not lose her time upon such thoughts as those you mention.

QUESTION. I quite understand that if the thought is not a good thought the soul should relinquish it for this simple regard, but if it is good, as in this case, and if it is God who gives it, will she not be guilty of ingratitude in not heeding what God presents to her, I do not mean by meditating on it, for she cannot, but to occupy herself before God with it? Or must she put even this thought from her to rest only in the presence of God? If the soul feels urged to make acts should she not do so, though I think she ought not to enlarge upon them? It does indeed occur to my mind that this would only be self-seeking, for, methinks, in God is included more than all these perceptions and acts which only tend to satisfy self-love under the pretext of not failing in correspondence to Him and of not remaining idle and negligent.

ANSWER. We must receive passively the good thoughts, lights and affections that God gives us, but without moving or diverting ourselves from God, and when He excites us to utter some words to Him we must follow the attraction simply and briefly.

QUESTION. It likewise seems to me that if God does not give any perceptions or sentiments the soul should not seek them but remain as tranquilly as possible before His divine goodness, although it would afford her satisfaction to correspond in some manner by being willing to act and not to stagnate in the negligence which she fears on every side.

ANSWER. You have already been told several times that when God gives nothing nor excites the soul to

anything she should content herself with remaining peacefully and reverentially before His goodness, nor fear that this is negligence. Such apprehensions come from self-love.

QUESTION. I find it difficult to realize that one may be united to God when the mind is full of fears and distraction, although, indeed, the soul has no desire for them since they cause her suffering.
ANSWER. The soul ought to hold herself united to God in the sufferings which His goodness sends her, however painful and worrying they may be.

QUESTION. The paper says[1] that we must no longer make use of the faculties. Now as to the will if it is moved to produce these acts ought it not to do so lest this inaction might come from negligence of soul, and if deprived of this impetus should it not make acts of acceptation, of submission and similar ? However, I can see very well that this simple regard includes all acts, and, besides, the soul finds herself so denuded that she does not know what to do. If she can, as the paper says, pass over all that impedes her way she will be cured, but she tries in vain. God hides Himself, she can neither see nor discern Him although she seeks Him. Instead of finding Him she sees only herself all naked and full of miseries, weighed down in infidelities. The sight sometimes makes her stop short, not daring to go further, yet she would wish to rid herself of these hindrances. I feel this very diversely and mention it once for all to know how I should behave in such difficulties.

ANSWER. Always follow the inward attraction and make acts when God excites them but not otherwise.

[1] This evidently refers to advice already given.

Self-love being deprived of sentiments likes to make these acts of submission and acceptation just to satisfy itself. But what God wishes of the soul is this simple regard or maintaining herself in calmness and repose, tranquil and unquestioning before Him, though with neither perception nor feeling of His goodness. All these investigations are simply the product of self-love.

QUESTION. As to the other faculties, I do not speak of their occupations for I am not able to make any use of them, but I would gladly desire to keep the will always active or, if not indeed active, for it rarely has this power, to preserve an inward silence which it sometimes experiences. I cannot explain, if not that the soul is in truth utterly powerless, yet certain movements imperceptibly and in an unaccountable way hold her occupied. It is I know not what which binds the soul fast and keeps her at the mercy of the action of her God in a sweet repose. This is how I have experienced it and with a tranquillity, which, to me, is unusual.[1]

The Saint's answer to this question is not in the manuscript.

QUESTION. I have likewise had this experience: Amidst the worries of a new charge and wishing to sacrifice myself by means of this unique regard I was completely deprived of the power that would enable me to do so, and, to that degree that I was conscious of nothing save my privation, in which I dwelt con-

[1] "Repose," says St. Francis, "does not consist in abiding in a state of immobility but in having no need of anything; it lies not in the fact of being without movement but in lacking nothing from the want of movement."—*Traité de l'Amour de Dieu*, vol 1, l.v. ch. iii, p. 266.

tentedly, and methought, had my Jesus wished for me still greater denudation I should have accepted it so as to possess nothing, not even myself.

ANSWER. This self cannot lose itself, and it wants to be always doing something to satisy self. Take no notice of these desires and suffer all in unity of spirit, contenting yourself with what God gives you.[1]

QUESTION. And again amidst the trouble and ennui of the burden of superiorship I wished to be submissive to the will of God and to do my duty in my charge ; wishing this as much for myself as for others on account of the scruples I have of not doing my duty, but I found it was not possible to me. On the contrary, I remained in obscurity. My mind was in a certain state like that of one who is in the power of another who wishes to annihilate him. No light had I, if not indeed, that I might have wished to be already wholly lost in this abyss of love, for I was in profound peace, but not too sensibly. This state has several times been of use to me in making me go to prayer.

I am sending you a canticle on the lights I have received. I begged a Sister to compose it for me, under the pretext of exercising her mind.

ANSWER. Our Lord so often makes you experience that He wishes you to look to Him and trust to His goodness, that I do not know how you can be so bold as to be always wishing to do something simply for your own satisfaction: you do not wish to do it, but you do it. The canticle is just what is uppermost in my own mind.

QUESTION. In my last retreat I had this thought and

[1] *Cf St. John of the Cross, Obscure Night,* book 1, ch. ii.

it often recurs to me : *Why dost thou want support? Am I not thy support? . . . The unique regard ought to be enough for thee.* But when fears of idleness and loss of time, added to the thought that I have not made myself thoroughly known to *your Charity*, come to my mind I do not know what to do, and my soul looks out to find upon what it can lean ; my mind now and then starts off into action, and even my body wants to be up and doing to prove its fidelity to God : sometimes this serves only to augment my trouble and I cannot stop the oscillations of my mind, unless indeed the will of *your Charity* can keep it still : hence I ask your decision on each point so that I may always hold to it.

Perceptions, sentiments, states, vary very much at times and this it is that makes me so enlarge on the subject in my questions. I repeat then, I have this light : When God is far away and fears are strong I yearn to seek support in words and when I am at liberty to utter them (which is not always the case) I say, *My God, my all, reign, act, I am all thine, I wish only to live to do Thy will. Thou who art my portion, my eternal inheritance* . . . which words I pronounce vocally, as it were by way of a sigh, and it relieves, not only the mind, but also the body which now and again experiences a certain oppression.

Answer. It is so manifest that God wishes Himself to be your only support that your soul does very wrong in seeking any other. I tell you again and this is the truth ; the unique regard ought to suffice for you. All your fears of loss of time, of being idle, of not making yourself understood proceed from no other cause than this : that it is you yourself who want to follow your own way of self-research and self-satisfaction and to turn from God's way, unless

His goodness is continually making itself felt and giving you palpable evidence of its solidity, for then in very truth self-love is satisfied. Now fidelity to God requires that we remain in the state in which He places us. In joy rejoicing, in nakedness remaining stript of all things, in suffering to endure, in pain patient. This is virtue and it is what God desires of you, abiding immovable unless moved by Him or that He gives you liberty to utter vocal words, which is good. I know you thoroughly, do not doubt it, and you express yourself very clearly.

QUESTION. There are times when these fears though sensible are not very troublesome, although one may be dry, devoid of the feeling of the presence of God and in utter destitution, the soul would wish to be nothing, abiding peacefully in the will of God.

ANSWER. You must remain thus for it is good.

QUESTION. In wishing nothing the soul experiences a great peace; however, it seems to me at times that she ought at least to wish her advancement and that this would be pleasing to God. She knows indeed, that generally she does not wish anything but God and His will in all things, but on these occasions I fail in the application of my mind.

ANSWER. These wishes are nothing but self-seeking. The unique regard suffices for the application of our actions.

QUESTION. I have repeated in several places the same thing but it is because I have experienced it in different ways and to ask once for all what your Charity wishes or how you wish me to act, for my

desire is absolutely to follow God's path for me and what obedience directs.

ANSWER. Follow it then exactly for His goodness shows it to you clearly, of this you may be assured. Henceforth, to do otherwise would be obstinacy and displeasing to God.

QUESTION. My mind has no longer this perception and feeling of the loss of my soul in God such as I used formerly to experience. If I could I would like to recall it because it was an occupation to me but I cannot do it until God is pleased so to will.

ANSWER. You should not do so.

QUESTION. Moreover, I no longer have lights and good thoughts on the words of the Epistles and Gospels, and it seems to me this is accounted for by my negligence and that it is self-conceit in me not to study them. I know indeed that these words at times sink deep and that my heart is, apparently, altogether submissive and filled with reverence for their teaching. As to the mysteries, I do not trouble myself any longer about them. I reverence them in God in this simple regard. Yet it seems to me that usually, at the times these great Mysteries [are being celebrated] I have more difficulty [than I have at ordinary times] in keeping myself in this simple regard and find myself therein in more utter despoliation. However, this is not always the case.

ANSWER. You attribute everything to your negligence and cowardice. Take the good that is given you and when it is withdrawn from you do not seek

to have it back again. As for what you say of these great Mysteries, it is because you do not content yourself with the simple regard, this wanting to turn your thoughts to them deprives you of it. You will be doing and willing what God wills of you by maintaining yourself steadfastly in this simple regard in Him [this looking unto Him] without desire or movement on your own part, confiding yourself into His hands and taking what He gives you. Fidelity in this matter, walking in the way of the observances and in the practice of virtue, without eagerness, will keep you in the dispositions in which God wishes you to be. May His goodness give us grace. Pray for me. I am all yours in Him. God be praised.

Sister Jane Frances Frémyot.

I have just re-read your questions and my answers. To sum it all up: Everything ought to tend to and end in an undying fidelity to remain constant to these lights and simple regards and to receive all God gives you, neither allowing yourself any diversion therefrom, nor letting any distraction take hold of you. We must not leave the Giver to entertain ourselves with the beauty of His gifts. He will infuse them into you as He pleases and will excite you to whatever seems good to Him. It is for you to follow Him, without agitation; and when the perception and feeling of this simple regard is taken away and your soul left unsupported, do not seek for help; rest in His good pleasure, heeding not in what manner you are there. Make no acts nor desire any sensible feelings. Have no other solicitude than to remain peacefully and tranquilly in the dispositions in which your soul finds itself, even when it is aflame with love gently control it. As I have already said, let your chief care be to keep yourself, in all things without exception, in peace, repose and tranquillity

Make no self-examination, no reflections on whatever it may be, good or bad, not even in order to tell me; for it is all self-seeking. The less you see and look at yourself the more perfectly you will follow God's will. God be praised. (*Oeuvres*, t. iii, pp. 268-276.)

When St. Jane Frances was herself entering upon a form of passive prayer she addressed many questions to St. Francis of the same nature as those addressed to her in the above, and many of the answers here given are in substance, those of St. Francis to her, which document is embodied in Maupas's life of St. Chantal. As Mgr. Bougaud calls in question the accuracy of the arrangement of these Questions and Answers as given by Maupas,[1] we have in the following (which closes the document) followed Bougaud's version who says, " We give the authentic text from a manuscript."

St. Jane : " I ask for the honour of God, assistance in humbling myself. I think I ought to be attentive to say nothing that might redound in any manner whatever to my own praise or esteem." On the margin is written by St. Francis : " Do this and thou shalt live. Amen."

To the above question Mother de Chaugy gives the following answer which, she also tells us, was written on the margin by the holy Bishop.[2] " Without doubt who speaks little of self does extremely well, for whether it be to accuse oneself, or to praise oneself, or to speak contemptuously of oneself we shall find that our words always serve as a bait for vanity."[3]

[1] de Maupas, *Vie de la Vénérable Mère J. F. Frémyot, partie* 2, ch. vii, p. 260-268. Paris 1658.

[2] *St. Chantal et la Fondation de la Visitation*, par Mgr. Bougaud, 1ère partie, ch. xviii.

[3] *Mémoires 3me partie*, ch. xvii, p. 450.

Elsewhere St. Francis says : " Self-dispraise in general is no more than a tricky kind of boasting. It reminds me of oarsmen who turn their backs on the very place which with all the strength of their arms they are striving to reach." Camus. Translation. *The Spirit of St. F. de Sales*, p. 156.

Section II

Rules given by the Saint to discern if it is the Spirit of God that operates in the soul when it cannot act in prayer.

You ask me, my Daughter, when inward efforts are ineffectual how is one to know if this powerlessness is caused by God drawing the soul to simplicity and tranquillity in His presence ?

I answer that according to the teaching of authors on the spiritual life there are three signs by which we may know.

The First is : If one cannot any longer meditate or find anything but aridity in meditation, and if the mind notwithstanding its efforts comes back always to the same subject.

(Elsewhere the Saint says : There is no doubt that this difficulty of not being able to make considerations leads to a more simple prayer. However little the soul may feel herself growing calm and at ease in an attitude of reverence before God, this feeling ought to strengthen her in the way to which God is now undoubtedly calling her. She should not give up her prayer although she be spiritually poverty-stricken and suffers from distractions, but let her patiently and peacefully remain before God without

voluntarily giving way to distractions. (*Oeuvres*, t. iii, p. 458.)[1]

SECOND. If fixing the imagination and senses on any given subject no longer attracts us nor serves as any help towards the practice of virtue.

THIRD. And this is the surest mark, if the soul takes pleasure in being alone with a loving attention to God, in inward peace, quiet and repose, making no particular considerations, nor exercising, for at least any appreciable time, the powers of the memory and will in order to pass from one subject to another, but remaining only in a state of attention with a general amorous regard.[2]

Before giving up meditation to enter into the prayer of the presence of God we should have these signs. If the soul is really drawn to this attention, though she seems to do nothing at prayer, to occupy herself in nothing, making no use of the senses, let her not fear to lose herself or think that the time so spent is useless for though the [other] powers of the soul cease to act the intelligence remains. In short, in the case of which we treat it suffices for you to know that it is enough that the understanding may be inactive in regard to all special things, temporal or spiritual, and the will may have no inclination to dwell on them, this is understood when the action of grace is confined to our intelligence ; for when it communicates itself at the same time to the will, which in a greater or less degree it [almost] always does, the soul does not cease to hear, to consider, to attend to her occupations, to unite herself to the divine action, and even so far as to lose herself therein, being carried away by love to such an extent as to

[1] *Cf Traité de l'Amour de Dieu*, l. vi. ch. ix, p. 335.

[2] *Cf St. John of the Cross. Ascent of Mount Carmel*, b. ii, ch. xiv. p. 106.

be unable to render any account to herself as to whether she understands or whether she loves.

In this state God is the principal agent who prepares and teaches ; the soul is she who receives the spiritual gifts that are given, these gifts are attention and divine love united in one. Now since His goodness from that time treats with the soul as a Giver she ought to go to God with a trustful heart, yet making no special acts other than those for which He gives her an attraction. Remaining quite passive, in no way energising herself, looking unto God with the quiet and the infantile glance of a child, thus with simple attention conjoining love with love. If the soul wishes to go forth from this very simple, loving, tranquil, inarticulate attention her action puts a stop to the good things which God communicates through this mere attention which He requires of her. Hence she ought to be free, detached, passive, calm, like unto God ; for in order to receive these divine operations the mind must be utterly detached and profoundly humble. If the soul wishes to lean upon some thought, some discourse, some consolation and to make some particular act thereon, this will only serve to distract her and to turn her away from the deep utterance to which God gives voice in the very core of her heart. For, in this sacred solitude all the faculties should be in silence, peace and tranquillity that the soul may hear what He has to say.

Now, inasmuch as this peace speaks within her, when the soul feels herself drawn into a listening silence her loving regard must be quite simple, without either solicitude or reflection ; in so much that she forgets well-nigh everything in her desire to give her attention, so that she may be free to do what grace makes known to her.

Note, my Daughter, once the soul begins to enter

into this simple and inactive state she ought not at any time or season to apply herself to meditation, nor should she expect spiritual lights or consolations but remain standing, as it were at attention, without support ; the mind free of desire of any good thing present or absent, as Holy Scripture says : Elle veillera debout à garder ses sens, les laissant à bas ; elle tiendra sa démarche ferme sur la garde de ses puissances, ne leur laissant faire aucune pensée d'elles-mêmes ; elle contemplera ce qui lui sera dit ; elle recevra paisiblement ce qui lui sera communiqué.[1] For it is impossible that this elevated wisdom can be received save by a singular detachment from consolations and from all special affections. Keep your soul in freedom, in peace, in calm ; detached from the sweets and the servitude of its works, nor let it worry about any care or solicitude, high or low ; make it a captive to solitude for the sooner it abstains from such things the more fully will it enter into this holy inaction and tranquillity.[2] *They will infuse into it,* says holy Scripture, *the spirit of divine wisdom, loving, tranquil, solid, peaceable, and gentle*[3] and that which God operates in the soul during this divine leisure, this solitude, is an inestimable good, greater than you can realise.

[1] We think the Saint must be referring to the following verse : " I will stand upon my watch and fix my foot upon the tower and I will watch to see what will be said to me and what I shall answer to Him that reproveth me.—Habac. ii, 1. To stand upon the watch, St. John of the Cross interprets to cast off all desire ; to fix the foot, to cease from all reflections of sense that we may behold and understand what God will speak to us. Thus, out of this obscure night spring, first, the knowledge of oneself and on that as on a foundation is built up the knowledge of God. " Let me know myself," said St. Augustine. " I shall then know Thee, O my God ! ' for, as philosophers say, ' one extreme is known by another ! ' ".—*The Obscure Night of the Soul,* b. i, ch. xii.

[2] *Cf The Ascent of Mount Carmel,* b. ii. ch. xiv. pp. 110 *sq.*

[3] But the wisdom that is from above first indeed, is chaste, then peaceable, modest, easy to be persuaded, consenting to the good, full of mercy and good fruits, without judging, without dissimulation, and the fruit of justice is sown in peace.—James iii, 17 and 18.

The divine Master erects a supernatural edifice in each soul in the manner He pleases. Mortify your nature, annihilate its activities and all that may be in contradistinction to His design. Grace wills to erect this edifice by means that you cannot know. In this holy inactivity affection develops and at such times the darts of divine love penetrate far deeper, we feel this. Care contracts the spirit, expansion belongs to repose.

Every human affection of the soul must of itself melt and flow freely, unimpeded, into the will of God, otherwise how should God be all in all to man? The wisdom of God, to which the understanding must be united, has neither form nor image that can fall under the senses and the intelligence. But in order to obtain this perfect union of the soul with divine wisdom there must needs be between the one and the other a certain resemblance and similitude ; hence it follows that the soul ought to be pure and simple, nor limited, nor impeded by any form or image that would check this union of spirit with spirit. The perfection of the memory is that it may be so absorbed in God that the soul forgets all things and itself, and reposes suavely in God alone, far from the clamour of thoughts and undisciplined imaginations. The more the memory is emptied of forms and of notable things, save such as pertain to the Divinity, to God made man (the remembrance of which always helps, for He is the true way, the Guide, the Author of all good) the more it becomes filled with God and keeps itself empty of all else in the hope that He will the more replenish it.[1] What you must do then is to live in the pure and absolute presence of God so that whenever distinct forms or images present themselves, the

[1] *Cf Ascent of Mount Carmel*, b.ii, ch. xiv. p. 110, and *Traité de l'Amour de Dieu*, i, vi. ch. x.

soul, without a moment's pause, should turn towards God, and, always, with a loving affection, neither thinking of, nor looking upon what has been presented to the mind, unless obliged by duty, and in this case let it be done in a detached spirit lest it leave in the faculties some hitch or impediment. But you ought to think and remember what is your duty ; provided this be done without any attachment to it or any considerations of propriety and special regard, it will do you no harm. (*Oeuvres*, t. iii, pp. 276-281.)

The following letter seems to be a necessary complement to the subject treated of in the preceding pages. But such instructions as are already contained in the above we shall omit, to avoid repetition.

Most willingly will I give you some signs by which you shall know if your repose and quietude at prayer is good and God-given.

It is a sign that it is from God ; if you find this attraction leads to lowliness and contempt of self.

If its consolations detach and divest you of any yearning to attach yourself to any creature or any earthly thing.

If you are led thereby to make a better manifestation of yourself, to be very simple, sincere, upright, candid ; or in other words, to be like unto a little child.

If, notwithstanding the suavity you receive from this sweet repose, you are ready, should God so will, to resume again the use of the imagination, of considerations, nay, even, to bear aridities.

If you are more patient and more humble in suffering your infirmities and still better, if your desire for

suffering increases, regardless of relief, or contentment other than that of giving pleasure to your Spouse.

Scan briefly and in a general way your attraction and amorous sleep to see if it does not make the world, personal vanity and self-interest seem more contemptible. In a word, if you learn from it to trample under foot all earthly glories and even your own self. If it teach you to prize contempt, abjection, pain and the Cross more than ought else. And, moreover, my dear Daughter, this I maintain, your attraction is, undoubtedly, good and it is from God. Do not be anxious about the nourishment of your soul for this sleep is worth more than all other meats and although it seems to you that your soul is slumbering, believe me it is not without nourishment, without partakng of right good and delicious food. But being so completely taken up with the love of Jesus, upon which you feast, it takes no notice of other banquets which He provides for it, and so it must needs do, for, otherwise, the soul puts itself in danger of falling from its place. (*Oeuvres*, t. iii, pp. 281-283.)

Section III

Words of the Saint to a soul led by the way of simplicity and of complete detachment.[1]

God wills you to be in an extremely passive state, giving no thought to your future perseverance nor to your present fidelity and acceptability to God. Empty

[1] Extract from an ancient manuscript of the contemporaries of the Saint preserved in the archives of the First Monastery of Annecy. These words collected by one of our first Mothers, to whom they were addressed, are a revelation of the dispositions of the Saint, as we have it in her own words that they were the counsels she had received at the time she was herself suffering from such bitter spiritual trials.—Note to French edition.

yourself of self and of all solicitude, all apprehension, all ennui, all dread of a prolongation of this state wherein everything gives pain and is done with fear. This simple regard [this looking unto God] with unquestioning obedience will be your safeguard. I tell you again, on the part of God, you are too introspective. Do not put yourself to any more pain about your pain ; speak of it neither to God nor within yourself : never reflect on it nor think how to express yourself about it to anyone whatsoever and make no examination upon it. Hide your pain from yourself and look unto God as if you did not feel it. If you speak to Him let it be of Himself and not of your trouble. Lifting your eyes to heaven with a trustful smile, be content with saying : O Eternity ! Eternity ! Read sometimes the sixty-fifth letter of the fourth book which our Blessed Father once wrote to me.[1] Abide submissively in the will of God's good pleasure which impoverishes you and strips you of every manner of inward satisfaction, having taken from you all knowledge of the blessings and gifts which are yours through His grace. His goodness has in such a manner infused these good things into your soul that they are inseparable from your inward life. But the Divine Guide, to raise you to a higher perfection, has taken your faith, your hope in Him, your love of His goodness, your trust, the sense of abandonment and repose which you have had in Him, together with all the inward faculties of your soul and the precious gifts which He had conferred upon you. All He has taken and thrown into the crucible,

[1] In the new Annecy edition of St. Francis's works, this letter, dated March 28th, 1612, is in the fifteenth volume. (Vol. 5 of letters, page 197.) As it is, apparently, the only letter, of the many she received from St. Francis, recommended by St. Chantal to the perusal of others, and as we find her more than once recommending it, it may be of interest to the reader, so we have given an English rendering of it at the end of this volume.—Compilers' note.

into the fire of His most pure and divine love. Every pleasure, satisfaction and contentment He has thus consumed and annihilated in you. And this not only as regards terrestrial things, for that has been done long since, but the divine Master wishes to annihilate in you the very pleasure that you have taken in these graces with which He has endowed you. As He gave them so now He has, as regards feeling, deprived you of them, for He wants your soul to be occupied not with His gifts but with Himself alone. God having taken from you all knowledge, perception, realisation of these things, having beggared you, will have you abide patient and submissive to His good pleasure, with no desire, sight, knowledge ; (herein is the test of your faith ;) nor any other virtue, relish, satisfaction, sensible devotion or sentiment, whatever it may be : in short, without any graces. You, contenting yourself that God has all these things in Himself and that, maintaining yourself united to Him, you possess all that is in Him. Above all, never deliberately lose your time in thinking how you are united to God, nor comment within yourself upon your submission, abandonment, confidence. Let it be enough for you that He knows and sees, and that at present all He wishes of you is the patient abiding with peace and quiet in Him, by this simple regard, drawing nigh unto Him as far as you are able, while His divine operations are taking place within you. As to knowing if this state will last long, we must leave that to God, without desiring to be delivered from it or seeking to enquire into its duration : submissive, should it please His goodness to keep you in it till the judgment day. Now amid all this anguish your only fear is that of offending Him, of not giving Him pleasure, of not being able to serve and glorify Him for all Eternity. But I assure you on the part of God, to

whom you have consecrated yourself for so long a time, that this state is more agreeable to Him than if He held you ravished to the third heaven and in the possession of all the virtues, all the joys and sentiments of which He has now deprived you; for in reality and in substance you have all these virtues though you have not the knowledge nor the realisation of them; hence have you them all the more purely and perfectly and in a far higher degree, inasmuch as they are apart from all sensible consolations. The more completely they are lost to your senses the more precious they are in God's eyes by your humble submission to His divine will which makes you thus die to self and incapable of any other utterance, unless indeed it be, *All is consummated.* My God, I have delivered over my whole being into Thy blessed hands to dispose of as Thou pleasest; to Thee I consign the care of all my inward life. Govern it according to Thy good pleasure; for myself I only ask to abide faithfully in patience and to keep my mind to this very simple and unique regard in Thee. [This looking unto Thee] without letting it roam elsewhere. Consequent on this every reflection, with the aid of divine grace, every act will die, while you rest in the hands of God, patient and suffering, loyal to the observance of your Rule, perseverant in your spiritual exercises and following fuller and fuller light, cost what it may. To sum up the remedy I have prescribed for your trouble in a few words: By your obedience to the will of God signified to you through her whom you regard in God and God in her, remain, I beseech of you, unshaken in the assurance I give you on His part that your faith, hope and charity are more virile and more perfect than they have ever been. Think no more whether you possess them or possess any virtue. With a mental loving glance at your resolu-

tions abide in this surety. Carefully avoid any desire to be delivered from your trouble and deprivation; it is a grace which God vouchsafes in order to perfect in you all virtues, it is a reward and not a chastisement. Have no doubt of this. God wills that you should bear this trial patiently, in absolute submission to Him, without allowing your mind to seek for either sight or knowledge of what is passing within you; forbid it all disputation or reflections on your temptations whatever they may be, nor ask yourself why this trial is given you. Make no effort to analyse or to subdue your sufferings, temptations, troubles, sorrows, darkness, obscurity, anxieties, embarrassments, extravagant thoughts; nor anything whatsoever that exists or passes in your inner life, however painful and martyrising it may be, neither get alarmed nor be surprised, nor voluntarily make any reflections thereon, and do all this absolutely, with no reservation. Regard them all as cruel temptations, hold yourself above them, feign not to see them however keenly you may feel them, neither speak of them to God nor to yourself . . . look at God and let Him act; this alone is all you have to do and this is the only exercise God requires of you and to which He attracts you. And besides it is what our Blessed Father invariably commanded me to practise and which I, on his part, recommend to you. . . . Entertain no desire to see, to feel, or to make acts, but abide tranquilly, reposefully, trustfully, patiently, in His presence, giving no thought to see how you are there, or what you are doing, feeling or suffering there, or what the soul is doing, has done or will do, or what will happen to it in any occurrence or event whatsoever. It must be absolutely immovable, must not stir, for this unique perception of God (regard en Dieu) comprises all, and more es-

pecially in regard to suffering. You know this very well, and I, likewise, assure you of it. Remain then steadfast in this simplicity and as soon as you perceive your mind going from it gently bring it back, without act, look or reflection. *One thing only is necessary* to possess God. . . . Continue your communions and usual spiritual exercises, making no reflections how you perform them and leave the care of your salvation and of your inner life to the guidance of God as well as all else that concerns you. You have sacrificed and given all to Him, leave to Him the care of all. Amen. (*Oeuvres*, Vol. iii, pp. 283. *sqq.*)

CHAPTER VI

VISITATION ASCETICISM

THE Visitation was founded to satisfy the lawful desire for perfection of such women as were not attracted, or were physically unable to practise the bodily austerities which up to that time were universal in Religious Houses for, normally speaking, none could hope to become members of the existing Orders who were not in the vigour of age or of strong and healthy constitution.

In the new Institute there was no age limit. But from the beginning, sufficient health to enable the subject to follow the Rule, together with such mental and moral qualifications as its severe asceticism of mind and heart demanded, were always essential. In regard to the reception of the infirm, St. Jane says: "If there are any who by the advice and counsel of a prudent doctor require certain dispensations from the Rule, there ought to be only one such in each Monastery. (*Entr.* lix.)

She thus describes the ideal of the Visitation vocation:

Ardent love of God, zeal for His glory, entire resignation and renunciation of self, genuine humility and simplicity of heart are the virtues called for by our Rule and constitute our manner of life. But not many exercises of bodily mortification nor a multi-

plicity of devotions, not many such being enjoined on us. The world is ignorant and the eye of man makes little account of the virtues demanded by our Rule ; but we must observe them because we are gathered together here that we may live according to these holy Rules. They mark out for us a road, hard indeed to the flesh, bitter to the human mind, but sweet to the heart and pleasant to the soul which by this death of self is united to its God. (*Exh.* xvi. *sur le 24me Chap. de la Règle.*)

And St. Francis laid it down from the beginning that his Institute was to be founded on Mount Calvary.

By the embracement of all that was hard and bitter, abject and humiliating to nature, by subjugation of self-love in its endless variety of forms, he wished his Daughters so to practise self-effacement that it should become second nature to them, and make their daily life the home life of Nazareth.

And he would have them rival the other worldliness of the early Christian : " A Daughter of the Visitation," he says, " should respect and honour all kinds of persons, not showing contempt to anyone however poor and abject, accustoming herself to consider all Christians only as children of God and members of Jesus Christ, cordially embracing them in the unity of His mystic Body, in which all distinctions of poor and rich, master and servant, learned and ignorant, are forgotten and lost. In this same body she should consider herself, and the happiness of belonging to it ought to constitute her glory."[1]

This obscure lowly life so little appealed to the superficial, to the garrulous, bustling world that it is not surprising to find that, with no midnight bell

[1] *The Interior Spirit of the Religious of the Visitation of Holy Mary*, translated by the Sisters of the Visitation, Georgetown D.C. U.S.A., 1927. John Murphy, Baltimore, U.S.A., and Burns, Oates and Washbourne, Ltd., London, p. 101-2.

for k ving vigil, no appeal to the senses of long fasts, no great ceremonies, no solemn chanting of Holy Office, to break the monotony of the cloisters, the Visitation was soon looked upon with contempt and dubbed, " The Order of the Taking Down from the Cross." Thus did it win in its cradle the contumely with which St. Francis wished to embalm the hearts of his Daughters ; while God took care of their good repute, and the thoughtful lovers of the Crucified hailed in the new Congregation a store-house of inward activity to render service to the Church ; while the poor and the populace loved, " The Daughters of Holy Mary," as, with truer instinct, they entitled, " the holy Bishop's nuns."

From deprecatory remarks upon the new Congregation the unthinking passed to attacks upon the holy Bishop and accused him of losing his time and talents on an unworthy object. " What do you mean to do ? " said one such friend to him. " What do you mean to do with all this crowd of women and maidens ? Of what use will they be to the Church of God ? Are there not already enough of institutions into which these applicants might be drafted ? Would you not be doing better if you were to establish some college for the training and education of priests and spend your time on them, instead of on these persons to whom one must repeat a thing a hundred times before they can retain it ? And then, after all, if they do, it is a treasure hidden, a candlestick under a bushel. Is it not a case of painting on water and sowing on sand ? "

Thanks to this obtrusive questioner we have the following beautiful defence of our holy Order. Mgr. Camus tells us that, with an extraordinary serenity and sweetness St. Francis replied : " It is not for me to work with costly material ; goldsmiths handle the

precious metals, potters only clay. Believe me, God is a skilled workman ; with poor tools He can accomplish wonderful work. He is wont to choose weak things to confound the strong ; ignorance to confound knowledge, and that which is nothing to confound that which seems to be something. What did He not do with a rod in the hand of Moses ? With the jaw-bone of an ass in that of Samson ? With what did He vanquish Holofernes ? Was it not by the hand of a woman ? When He willed to create the world, out of what did He form it save nothingness ? Believe me great fires are often kindled from small sparks. Where was the sacred fire found when the Jews returned from their captivity among the Medes ? In a little mud ! This weaker sex is deserving of being treated with great tenderness : we must take much more care of it than we do of the stronger one. St. Bernard says that the charge of souls is for the weak far more than for the strong, Our Lord never refused His assistance to women. He was generally followed by several of them, and they did not forsake Him on the Cross, where He was abandoned by all His disciples except the beloved John. The Church, who gives the title of devout to this sex, does not hold it in such low esteem as you do . . . let us leave great designs to great workmen. God will do what he pleases with my little plan.[1]

When admitting any young girl into the Congregation he only spoke to her of Calvary, and the crosses that awaited her, of inward mortification, of surrender of the will, crucifixion of private judgment and death of self to live to God ; and St. Jane Frances's words of welcome to every aspirant were no less uninviting to the natural man.

[1] Camus. *The Spirit of St. Francis de Sales*, translated by J. S. p. 412 *sq.*

Still puzzled by the manifest happiness of those who had the spirit and the call to accept such an invitation, the man of the world now questions even the veracity of the holy Founders and we find him telling St. Francis that his Order is not so rigorous, so severe, as he makes it out to be, for he holds that the sickly and infirm can in it attain to equal sanctity with the strong and vigorous and yet the life led by all is the same.

To this new charge the Bishop replies : " Believe me that if the body is there preserved as if it were a vessel of election the spirit is there tested and tried in all possible ways, since the spirit that fails to stand every possible trial is no stone fit for the building up of this Congregation."[1]

On the form of Asceticism observed at the Visitation, St. Jane says :

To introduce any bodily austerities or to make them obligatory or of custom, would be destructive to the end for which the Order was instituted.

Addressing herself to some Sisters who had begun to undertake such in preparation for certain great festivals of the Church, she says : Give it up altogether, I entreat of you. It only fosters pride and a good opinion of oneself, for we begin to think that we are somewhat better than others, that we do more than they. And if those who come after us do not as we have done it will be said at once that they are less fervent.

For God's sake Sisters, let us give ourselves earnestly to the austerity enjoined on us ; that of the mind and heart, and give up those of the body. Nevertheless, if any one of you feel urged by God and drawn to do

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 235.

more than is set down she should make her desire known to her Superior, and if judged fitting, permission should be given her, not only for one day but for forty, or, for forty years if need be, and let her by all means practise her penance, but alone and in private. Yet faithfully to employ the opportunities that occur of mortifying yourselves and practising virtue will, in my opinion, advance you as much, nay, more, in perfection and be far more in conformity with the intentions of our Holy Founder. Believe me, if in all simplicity you receive whatever is presented to you in food, clothing or other things, embracing the mortifications, humiliations, contradictions, that come in your way, they will be as profitable, more profitable than the austerities you desire to practise. Where is the mortification when they are of your own choosing? You do not feel them very hard, rather do you take complacency out of them, and does not our saintly Founder say plainly: "Our own choice spoils all our works." Some of you make a practice of praying with bare knees on the ground. Now it will be not only equally acceptable but more acceptable to God if, instead, you remain kneeling with great reverence the whole time of your spiritual exercises, and immovable as long as you are able.

Be assured, my dear Daughters, that when the spirit is truly mortified the body feels its effects, and is thereby mortified and brought well into subjection. This [mortification of the spirit] costs [nature] more than taking the discipline for the space of a good *miserere*. And look at those souls so eager to mortify their bodies, to do more than the rest, just touch them with the tip of your finger to thwart or humiliate them, prick them ever so little in their reputation or repugnances and you will soon see how much their self-love flatters them, and the great opinion they

have of themselves ; how quick they are to take offence, how sensitive and immortified.

Let us then, dear Sisters, hold in high esteem this inward mortification of spirit and prize nothing in comparison thereto. It is all important for the perfection of our vocation, in making us acceptable in God's sight ; and finally it is the means by which we accomplish His divine will, which is all we have to desire and all to which we need apply ourselves. (*Exh.* ii *sur la Préface des Consts.*)

You say that it seems to you the Sisters are permitted by the article on obedience to ask leave to perform penances.

You are quite right and it is not contrary to the counsel of our Blessed Father : *Ask for nothing and refuse nothing.* He never intended to debar the liberty which the Rule gives for exigencies, nor for such souls as might believe that God was giving them a strong inspiration towards extraordinary austerities, but he wished them, as you may see, to defer to the judgment of the Superior before whom they must simply lay bare their need and their inspiration, so that she may discern according to her knowledge of the case if it be a suggestion of self-love or a true inspiration, and decide accordingly. And by her decision they must abide without asking or refusing anything. In this way both the Rule and the counsel will be maintained. (*Réps. sur la 3me Const.*)

Our grand obedience is our austerity. Where should our austerity be without it ? This then is our special order of perfection. We should love and exercise ourselves unceasingly in the absolute surrender of our will and of our liberty. This loving subjection of our Institute which develops the mortification of the spirit should be our daily life. (*Ibid., sur la 9me Const.*)

St. Francis says : " No austerity is equal to a will in continual submission," and that the devil is not afraid of austerity but he is of obedience. (*Traité de l'Amour de Dieu.*)

And in one of her Lenten Chapters St. Jane says : I can bring nothing more pressing before your eyes than the obligation we are under of reaching forward to perfection, for it is no child's play. Trust me, though men may tell you that we must walk in high ways, as long as we are in this life we must fear God. Without a holy fear of displeasing, of offending Him, of giving Him cause to withdraw from us His grace, His inspirations, we cannot maintain an effectual desire of serving Him. (*Exh.* x for Feasts.)

In answer to a question she urges those who are already a long way on the road to perfection in these words :

There is no doubt, Sister, but that those who are so completely delivered over to a life of mortification and abjection no longer put any hindrance to the reign of Our Lord in their souls and they do admirably in keeping themselves simply waiting upon His good pleasure. Yet such souls ought to be most careful to neglect nothing that tends to their perfection, otherwise they would be in great danger of losing in a short time what they have acquired with much labour. (*Réps. sur la 3me Const.*)

Speaking on these words of the Rule, *God grant that you observe all these things in love*, the Mother says :

Let us not walk as slaves and unwilling subjects of a hard law, but as the well-beloved Spouses and daughters of God, free and emancipated from the laws of the flesh and of the world, established under the grace of God, our only Spouse. We must follow Him.

make our way step by step after Him, drawn by His odours (that is, the actions He practised during His life.) The chief of these odours are poverty, contempt and pain. (*Exh.* xviii, *sur le 26me ch. de la Règle.*)

In the course of another instruction a Sister remarks that it has been observed that our manner towards seculars is not in conformity one House with another and asks how uniformity is to be kept in this matter. The Saint answers :

A very good question. It seems to me that it is almost impossible to keep complete uniformity in a matter of this kind because of the diversity of natures, habits, education and upbringing. But, notwithstanding this, all the Daughters of the Visitation, above all the Superiors, should strive carefully to mould their natural dispositions and habits on the model of their holy Founder and adorn themselves with his spirit, his sweetness, affability and graciousness ; they should be cordial, respectful and pleasing to everyone without however becoming too familiar or departing one iota from that modesty, discretion and gravity which characterised Him. This then is the general rule and the portrait we are to reproduce in ourselves. And when we take care to do so no marked difference will any longer be noticed in our exterior comportment. In truth we must give serious attention to this matter, otherwise we shall tarnish the lustre of our congregation and lose the conformity and affability which our Blessed Father so greatly desired to see among us. He used to tell us that we must be as grave as princesses because we were the Spouses of the Son of God, but simple and without affectation.

In this same conversation with her Daughters, St. Jane Frances tells them that the last and dearest wish

of St. Francis was that all the monasteries of the Visitation should always acknowledge Annecy as their Mother and Source, maintain with it the closest union of charity, conform themselves entirely to it and have recourse to it in all their doubts and difficulties ; and I am sure, dear Sisters, she continues, that this will of our Blessed Father, thus simply declared, will always hold absolute sway over our affections and that we shall carry it out inviolably. Every other kind of affliction, he said, he was capable of bearing, but that of seeing disunion between the Monasteries of the Visitation was beyond his strength, and certainly it would be far beyond mine, for I have infinitely less capacity for suffering than he.

Of Annecy itself she says :

His intention was that it should with cordial charity give itself to the full extent of its power to the service of the other Monasteries, without reserve of either its members or its goods and that it should be a model of exact observance to all the others, who would there always find every point of the Institute practised in its perfect vigour and integrity. (*Réps. sur le Coutumier 28me art.*)

In the course of her last exhortation on the Rule, the Mother says :

God grant that at the hour of death we may be able to say that we have finished, completed the work of our perfection, according to this holy Rule. This we shall accomplish perfectly when we are delivered from every other care than that of pleasing God. Delivered thereby from the miserable, evil and inordinate love of our bodies, of our minds, when we shall have shaken off and cast far from us the love and superfluous care of health, convenience, reputation ; the desire for consolations and satisfactions : in a

word, from all those impure and imperfect loves outside the love of God and irrelevant to it. I entreat you, dear Sisters, let us put on the armour of generosity that we may walk with fervour in the safe and sure road of our holy Rule—the road that ends in heaven. Courage then, God is with us, who shall gainsay us? God is on our side. He will take our part. Nothing daunted, let us undertake in good earnest the practice of it. Conforming ourselves carefully to it in all things, loving it intensely as a thing precious, honouring and esteeming it dearly as the road—the ladder—by which we shall reach heaven, nor grudge the toil; great will be the reward. Let us then keep before us the supreme delights that await us there and despise those of earth. Look to God, forget self and all else to please Him. To gain heaven we must mortify ourselves thoroughly and perseveringly, for it is only the violent that bear it away. *He that shall overcome*, says the Scripture, *I will make Him a pillar in the temple of my God and he shall go out no more*.[1]

Believe me, Daughters, heaven is well worth the pains we take to mortify our inclinations, moreover we must of necessity mortify them to get thither, because, covered with the old rags of our inclinations, we cannot enter into the kingdom nor to the nuptials of the Lamb. We must have on the wedding garment of holy virtues. Let us then take the sword in hand—be watchful and vigilant in doing battle with the enemy of our perfection. Take courage seeing the beauty of heaven. There is solace for pilgrims at sight of the land whither they are going.

We ought not to toil for heaven only, though it is well worth it, but rather that we may possess the God of heaven, for if He were not there, heaven with all its delights would be wearisome rather than delightful.

[1] Apoc. iii, 12.

Take heart then, toil for Him that you too may dwell in the eternal enjoyment of God. May He be pleased to grant us this grace in His sweet mercy. (*Exh.* xix, *Conclusion de l'explication de la Règle.*)

In the last chapter of her *Mémoires*, Mother de Chaugy gives us the following words of the venerated Mother. She says : I have been thinking this morning that no one under the sun is as happy as a Religious who loves God, her Superior and her cell. The Visitation will never fail for want of instruction because our Blessed Father has told us everything that is necessary for us. He has equipped our vessel well ; but if the wind of vanity get into our spirit we shall perish.

Would that I could write with my blood in every House of our Institute these words of his to us : The GENERAL of our Order is HUMILITY and if every Monastery obeys this General the whole Institute will be maintained in union and uniformity, for if in all of them we are humble that is all that is needed. What matters it to the heart of one that loves God whether or no she suffer or enjoy, provided she fulfils His will ? Would to God that my lips were pierced with a red-hot iron rather than that the mouth of any Daughter of the Visitation should ever open to the least word against the charity, the union and the gentle suavity in which they should abide. (de Chaugy, *Mémoires*, *3me partie*, ch. xxxi, p. 548.)

CHAPTER VII

The following extracts bearing on the subjects treated in the foregoing pages are taken from letters of S. Chantal not previously translated into English.

To Mother Péronne Marie de Châtel,

. . . . May God bless your dear heart and strengthen it against all the little assaults which in truth are not worthy of your notice, yet they are of value as sufferings, for we ought to prize anything that makes us a little more humble. Let humility and exact observance, my Daughter, be your one aim. Your path is a good one, I know it, but you must keep up your courage and joy, loving and cherishing every kind of contradiction and abjection. . . . I have nothing else to say, for I know you better than I know myself and have more dependance on you than I have on myself, and with good reason. (*Oeuvres*, t. iv, Vol. i *de Lettres*, *lettre* clxxix.)

To Sister Marie Aimée de Blonay,

Do as you tell me, fear nothing, stand in awe of nothing except sin ; do simply and carefully your best ; always ask light of God and abase yourself before Him with perfect trust that He will do in you and through you His holy will. (*Ibid.*, *lettre* ccxlvi.)

To Mother Jeanne Charlotte de Bréchard,

. . . This life is a continual death. I mean by this that we have continual opportunities of dying to ourselves, but when I see that it is to make grace live and reign in us, I bethink me we are indeed happy and have good reason to love and bless the sweet Saviour who puts us in the way of practising such holy virtues. (*Ibid.*, *lettre* ccxci.)

To Mother M. A. de Blonay,

. . . What does it matter if you are a little spoken against? Is it not the design of Our Lord that we should be the most obscure and humble in His Church, and what can serve better for this than contempt and censure? Oh, my Daughter, it is our spirit and nothing ought to be dearer to us. For love of God inculcate it in the hearts of your Daughters together with perfect and punctual observance. Let us seek no other perfection, let our aspiration go no further than this, but, I pray you, within this compass, let not one iota pass unpractised. (*Ibid.*, *lettre* cccl.)

To Mother Péronne Marie de Châtel,

. . . Ay, what is this? A Sister ten years in religion losing her time brooding over little dissatisfactions, philosophising over a word. Oh, verily this must not be. If God permits things to happen contrary to our expectations, or we think this or that about whatever it may be; though we may indeed feel the thing, we must not dwell upon it but simply cast ourselves into the bosom of divine Providence with full and loving acquiescence, glad that we are being stripped. Just look at what you are about.

In order to satisfy your self-love you look forward to the arrival of Monsignor [St. Francis de Sales] so that divine Providence may, through his saintly mind, confirm anew the approval he has already given you of your spiritual way, and this so emphatically it is quite unnecessary to reconsider the question ; but his previous assurance was not sufficiently detailed to give full satisfaction to your desires. I have no doubt that this has been the beginning of your trouble. Have done with it; your road is a safe and good one, you have only to walk ahead. No more reflections, I beg of you, trust me in this. Teach it boldly to your Daughters and do all you can to make them walk with simplicity without self-returns. (*Ibid.*, *lettre* cclxii.)

To Mother Anne Marie Rosset,

. . . In regard to anything that I write or say in the form of advice I wish you to remain in full liberty to do always as God will inspire you. Now take this literally, for I know when the soul is in fear she cannot follow as freely as it is requisite the lights God gives her . . . have a holy liberty of spirit. (*Ibid.*, *lettre* cccxxx.)

To Mother Anne Catherine de Beaumont,

I see that this good and sweet Saviour wishes to despoil you and strip you bare of all but Himself. Do not resist Him, neither through fear, nor desire, nor anxiety, nor in any other way, but commit yourself without reserve to His mercy. If it should please His goodness to take from you every aim and purpose of life, nay, even [the sense of] faith, let Him strip you. But you have not yet come to this extremity of denudation. Perhaps Our Lord will always let you

retain some little thing, as I see He does [so far] but should He deprive you of all, acquiesce and rest satisfied because the power resolutely to say the CREDO will never be taken from you. Let Him do whatever He pleases though it give you neither relish nor satisfaction ; this is the royal road. Read the little treatise on INTERIOR ABNEGATION and remember to send it back to me. Remain firm in your trust (though insensible to it) that God knows your strength and measures according to it the trials He will send you. Make everything help towards your spiritual progress without harassing yourself about anything, even about prayer. (Vol. ii, *lettre* cccxci.)

To Mother Marie Madeleine de Mouxy,

So, my dearest Sister, you are now a Mother. I beg of the divine goodness to give you the spirit of a Mother, that is, the qualities peculiar to spiritual Motherhood which are a most tender, cordial, vigilant love for the advancement of souls, devoid of all precipitancy, of all over-eagerness, especially in matters temporal. The confidence of a Mother in the providence and love of her Spouse should remove all such solicitude and be to her a surety that every necessity will be provided for by Him, so long as she trusts His goodness and has but one care ; to give Him pleasure by perfect observance. This will draw down upon you all kinds of blessings and I most solemnly assure you that if you so do you will live in abundance. We have so much experience of this loving Providence over souls who abandon themselves to it and leave all in its hands that I could never have a doubt of its care of you. I know well that you have always been drawn to this way ; follow it, my child, with a holy gaiety. (*Ibid.*, *lettre* cccxcviii.)

To Sister Hélène-Angelique L'Huillier,

O my Daughter! How truly noble we are in God's eyes when we are very insignificant in our own! Our daily imperfections are a great help to this. Let us then love them dearly. (*Ibid.*, *lettre* cdii.)

To Mother M. H. de Chastellux,

You have strong passions so do not flatter yourself that you will acquire the perfection you desire without labour. You must work hard to attain perfect mortification and bring your higher nature into play, holding it above all resentment and aversions, as a queen who reigns supreme and whose monarchy is absolute. (*Ibid.*, cdxvi.)

To Sister Anne Marie Rosset,

He who has given you this employment will be your yoke-fellow to lighten the burden for you if you give Him your consent. If tempted to distrust yourself be not astonished, throw yourself blindly into the arms of divine Providence. Once our hearts only seek God and His good pleasure the divine Saviour fills them with such an abundance of His spirit that nothing can any longer be seen therein but blessings and perfection. (*Ibid.*, *lettre* cdxxx.)

To Mother Anne Catherine de Beaumont,

The Spiritual Directory[1] gives full liberty to follow our interior attraction.

[1] The Spiritual Directory, drawn up, almost entirely, by St. Francis de Sales for the use of his Daughters, is but a setting forth of the super natural views with which he vivified his own works.

Continual attention to the divine presence, fidelity to grace, total indifference to all save the good pleasure of God, constant care to mortify all human inclinations ; in a word conformance of the heart to the heart of Jesus : Such are the ways by which the Daughter of the Visitation, modelling herself on the virtues of her Holy Founder, can, in a life to all appearance common and ordinary, raise herself to the highest sanctity. (Vol. ii, *lettre* cdlxviii.)

To Mother M. A. de Blonay,

. . . You will do well to make no account of Sister ——'s visions. Always inculcate true humility, simplicity and gentleness and the ecstasy of work and of actions. (*Ibid.*, *lettre* cdlxxxi.)

To Mother Paule Jeronyme de Monthoux,

I see you find it difficult to apply to prayer. Do not constrain yourself, suffer gently dryness and distractions. Since your mind is neither uneasy nor melancholy they produce no bad results. Let this and the consciousness that you are trying to practise virtue as events occur, content you. Above all, my dearest Daughter, mortify this desire that your opinion should prevail and your counsel be relied upon. Put away reflections on the past, but when the faults you have committed and are committing come before you, humble yourself generously, for this is true virtue and draws down divine and most necessary graces. (T. v. Vol. ii, *lettre* dxvi.)

To Mother M. H. de Chastellux,

. . . Yes, my dearest Daughter, we must love

contempt and welcome it affectionately from whatever quarter it may be presented to us, nor beguile our time reflecting on it, nor despising it. In the midst of difficulties and sorrows keep your eyes firmly set on God. Let not your mind be troubled with fears, cares, apprehensions, nay, not even with solicitude : do what is in your power suavely and keep your peace unruffled. God will hasten to your succour if in all things you repose implicit trust in Him and never let your attention be diverted from Him. (*Ibid.*, *lettre* dxix.)

To Sister Marie Constance de Bressand,

. . . Your Retreat has been a good one. Do not trouble any further to make acts in prayer, remain humble and submissive in your state of incapacity ; it is all God asks of you, so be faithful to it. I see that you are always strongly attracted to complete denudation and that this abandonment in God is the supreme delight of your soul. Follow faithfully this attraction in action as well as in prayer, casting aside all those fears of failure and desires to give satisfaction. Despise all such thoughts and welcome very lovingly your abjection in all things, for this practice is solid and a guarantee of all the rest. (Vol. ii, *lettre* dxxi.)

To Sister Hélène Marie Grison,

My dear Daughter, medicines are always a little bitter yet we take them because we expect them to do us good, so do not fail to take the mortifications that present themselves, since to this we are in conscience obliged for the salvation of general and individual souls. It gives me great comfort and I praise God that you are in earnest about your amendment and

about loving our good God. Grow in these dispositions and persevere and you will receive a thousand consolations ; they are the best remedy for your spiritual and corporal ills, outside the principal motive of pleasing Our Lord, whom I beseech to strengthen you in this holy enterprise. Do not crack your brain trying to make acts and to work your understanding, for to acquiesce fully in His good pleasure, in our sorrows and ailments of body and soul, is a very profitable prayer and very agreeable to God. (*Ibid.*, *lettre* dxxii.)

To Sister M. A. Fichet.

The ambition in which we should wish to excel above all others is most holy humility and the love of our own abjection. Let this, I beseech you, be your unique glory and satisfaction. Never forget what our Blessed Father has so often said to us : " As long as you love your lowliness and abjection you will abound in the blessings of God but as soon as you exalt yourselves above others His blessings will cease." Arm yourself then against temptations to the vain and dangerous praise of the world ; a very good remedy for this is the practice of inward virtues which are known only to God and to ourselves ; they are the best for us who ought to be absolutely hidden from the eyes of the world. In this inward love alone and in perfect gentleness and simplicity we should excel, that is to say, we must sink deeper and deeper into our own insignificance, annihilate our own judgments and our own will, in short, everything of self. I have always remarked that God gives you many good affections. This makes me hope that you will produce good effects without which the good affections are of little or no use. . . . Your prayer will always be good when it

leads to mortification. Humble yourself for your imperfections but don't be surprised at them ; as our Blessed Father used to say : " Humility of heart is the best medicine for all sorts of maladies ". . . . Think often that your most important business in life is your own salvation and to perfect yourself according to your Institute. Ask this same grace for me. (*Ibid., lettre* dlxiv.)

To Mother M. A. de Blonay.

. . . Yes, let Sister Marguerite Jacqueline (de Lestang) follow her method of prayer and say nothing that might repel her from it lest it cause her to be troubled. . . You must not make her give it up, but induce her to draw therefrom resolutions to imitate the virtues which she sees Our Lord practise in the mysteries on which she contemplates, so that these flowers of consolation convert themselves into the fruit of good works ; above all of such good works as suppleness, gentleness and support of her neighbour ; and towards God, of the lowliness and simplicity He requires of us. (*Vol.* ii, *lettre* dlxix.)

To the same.

. . . Usually those Sisters who have so much feeling of sensible devotion are immortified. My God, how little true virtue there is ! Lowliness, true submission, love of obedience and of contempt are all that you need preach to them—an obedience established on a perfect abnegnation of our own will, unconcerned about what is commanded us whatever it may be. There is nothing that appeals to me like that ! What is it that makes good and perfect Religious if not submission, and not our own satisfactions

and sensible devotions? Certainly God has given us the grace to give such a bent to our novices here that if I wished them to go to the clouds they would try to lift themselves up, and if I were to lower them into the bowels of the earth they would bury themselves there, and so would the professed. That is why I call them good Religious, and consider our Sisters of Annecy are treasures. (*Ibid.*, *lettre* dlxxxiv.)

To Sister Anne Marguerite Clement.[1]

. . . Your [way] is solid and so manifestly from God that you must never follow any advice contrary to it. You do well to speak little of it. Very few persons are capable of giving wise advice to a soul whom God leads by this extraordinary path. Sometimes even devout servants of God will dissuade her from it because they have not received divine intelligence for such guidance, or they fear self-deception in a way so little known to men. Now the intimate experience that you have of its excellence and the assurance you have received on this point, should make you hold firmly to it. In short its fruits are good: peace, trust in God, absolute submission, complete detachment, exact observance, avoidance of sin, love of mortification and of humiliations. All these find place in your soul and prove infallibly that your way is good, they are certain signs of a special providence in God's guidance of you. But chiefly do I prize the clear understanding you have of your total dependence on God in seeing your prompt deliverance from temptations and troubles. Oh, my beloved Daughter, you must love the Lord well

[1] For further information on this favoured Servant of God see Sandreau, *Les Tendresses du Seigneur pour une âme fidèle, ou Vie de la Mère Anne-Marguérite Clement.* Paris, Charles Amat, Editeur 11, Rue Cassette, 1916.

and serve Him with great purity of spirit. . . As regards these annoying thoughts of the Sisters, they do not know you well enough yet. All that will, I hope disappear with time ; if not, you should believe that God permits it in order to advance the union of your soul with Him. Nothing tightens the bond of this union better than [making good use of] opportunities of abjection. (Vol. ii, *lettre* dxciv.)

To Mother Marie-Constance de Bressand.

. . . Have a great, a long-drawn-out courage and you will see the glory of God increasing in your house like the glow of a beautiful dawn. I long for this.

Keep minds expansive, joyous and generous. Make them feel confident of your good will ; and though all may not advance with that perfection you would like to see at this commencement, for the love of God, my dearest Daughter, do not let any dissatisfaction or ennui be seen on your part, for that would damp their courage, whereas to show content will raise it.

Do not at present retrench the caresses, but in a few months try gradually to do so, though not entirely, for I understand that it is only necessary to cut off a superfluity of them.

Take relief as you feel the need of it and do not repulse those who wish you to do so. . .

It is incredible what good fruit comes of Superiors showing solicitude for the health and relief of the Sisters.

Be a pillar of strength to all and persevere in winning hearts, there is no means comparable to it for helping others. . . Oh, my most dear Daughter, God will give you light for all. Abide in the bosom of His

Providence, stripped of all that is not He, in complete self-abandonment. Treasure up and keep alive all tenderness of heart towards your Daughters, it is a new gift of God. Keep also the assurance of this truth that God has so placed you in my heart that my soul loves yours very intimately.

I have no leisure to write more but believe me, I shall never grow weary of serving you. Adieu, etc., (*Ibid.*; *lettre* dclxiv.)

To Mother M. J. Favre.

Do not grieve at seeing your Daughters a little slothful, though it may be one of the most dangerous of evils to a soul in religion. I always say it is the pest of monasteries. However, if you will follow my advice you will take very little notice of this evil to those who displease you by it. I think it will be more to their profit to urge them by love and to encourage them, show them the good hopes you have of their advancement, for if they saw that you were weary of their little and cowardly ways and often spoke to them on the subject, without doubt they would get discouraged and the fretfulness that would ensue would make life hang so heavily on their hands that they would only become more effortless. All said and done, if, as you say, God does not Himself energise them, your efforts will be of little avail, so we must just do gently what we can, have patience and keep them as cheerful and contented as possible. (*Ibid.*, *lettre* dclxvi.)

To Mother M. C. de Bressand.

As to Sister——she is so good and so innocent a soul that I have no doubt God greatly favours her. You

must tell her to do nothing to encourage these things [you tell me about] not to let her mind reflect on them ; let her leave herself gently and simply in Our Lord's hands to be guided accordingly to His good pleasure and cling closely to obedience. Give her some occupation and something to interest her, and take care that she eats and sleeps well ; above all keep her from looking at what passes in her and what comes upon her, for it is dangerous and a great hindrance in her path. Let her work at simplicity and strip herself bare of all self-interest and of her inward suavities, and tell her to check every tendency in her save seeking God alone.

. . . Père Cotton was right in disapproving of Sister ——'s loud laughter. The spirit of God does not operate in such levity. This Father is a remarkable man and very capable in all spiritual matters. (*Ibid.*, *lettre* dclxix.)

To Sister Anne-Marguerite Guérin.

Since these upliftings of spirit are less frequent and do not produce any subtle thoughts ; but that on the contrary, they humble you and create a profound reverence to the presence of God, and draw you to Him in simplicity with a certain taste of His infinite Goodness, it seems to me that you should neither resist them nor in any manner co-operate save with a very simple abandonment of yourself to His mercy. However, I submit this advice to your Sister, the Superior, who, by the effects they produce in you, can judge if you should resist, for too great weakening of the body must be avoided. Continue faithful to the ordinary manner of prayer, that is to say, remaining in the presence of God in a humble spirit and doing nothing but that. (*Ibid.*, *lettre* dclxxx.)

To Mother M.A. Fichet,

Despise the scorn with which you are treated but love the scorner. (*Ibid., lettre* dcxciv.)

To Mother M.J. Favre.

. . . Providence has willed to refine your soul in the crucible from which by His grace you are come forth clear and blameless. It is true if we could desire anything it should be the most humbling and abject humiliations and persecutions, for this is how the soul is in truth purified and united heart to heart to its God. All do not merit such a grace. Verily, the dispositions in which God holds you are altogether to my liking. Oh, how happy are the souls who live in a holy abasement and annihilation ! It is the royal road by which nothing is to be feared. May God in His goodness maintain you therein. (Vol. ii, *lettre* dcc.)

To a Superior of the Visitation (*name not given*).

My own Daughter, I agree with you we should not attach ourselves to the direction of any one person in particular but keep our universal spirit, which our written observance and their lordships, our Bishops, give us. It is marvellous how well things go by keeping to this.

We are the true Daughters of the clergy and the Bishops are our true fathers, hence it follows that their good ecclesiastical officers are our dear brothers. In common with us they profit by the knowledge they acquire of the spirit of our Blessed Father, who wished that they should be our ordinary confessors and even our spiritual Fathers. But, my Daughter, it is not infringing this liberty sometimes to employ the regular

clergy who are the most conformable to our spirit and take the greatest interest in our congregation. Make such use of their advice as seems good to you. Holy and earnest religious men are as averse to losing their time with us as we are to lose it with them. Their time and liberty are as dear to them as ours is to us, and they have such important business to see to that they will be very glad not to meddle too much with our trivial little affairs. (*Ibid.*, *lettre* dccxxiii.)

To Mother Jeanne Charlotte de Bréchard.

. . . We must needs have brave hearts sweetly to support all the troubles of this life! But if we regard them in their origin they will be to us a consolation and a blessing, for after all, this lovable Father can send us nothing that is not for His greater glory and our profit; that, dearest Daughter, ought to be enough for us. (Vol. iii, *lettre* dcclxxi.)

To Sister Anne Catherine de Sautereau.

. . . Keep your attention on God and pay no heed to what passes within you. If He sometimes hide Himself it is that He wishes to take pleasure in your search for Him; make it then with love and simplicity, without ever letting yourself grow slack in this holy exercise. With trust and joy hold your courage high nor ever let it flag. A soul that would not for all the world offend God has the foundation of true joy. May God fill you with His holy love. (Vol. iii, *lettre* dcclxxiii.)

To Mother Marie Aimée de Blonay.

. . . Truly, my Daughter, I am not capable of judg-

ing of this Sister whose path is so extraordinary. So much science and so many words are somewhat to be feared. Oh, may God always keep us in the lowly valleys of genuine humility and simplicity. It is more to my liking. (*Ibid.*, *lettre* dccxcix.)

To Sister Anne Catherine de Sautereau.

. . . What is this that you tell me, my dear Daughter? That your mind is timorous and always in a state of turmoil and scrutinising itself? Oh God, you must extricate yourself from this puerility and childishness; it is quite time. You should be above all that. Nevertheless, suffer with humility and gentleness the temptations and inclinations that come therefrom, loving this abjection but never in any way consenting thereto.

Cast yourself, all your miseries, interests and affections into the bosom of God's goodness. Submit to be governed by Providence and obedience with closed eyes and never open them to see whither you are going, yet always going, occupying yourself the while with God alone and the work He presents to you at each moment and occasion, performing it faithfully with your higher nature, regardless of repugnances and oblivious of your feelings, for such we must absolutely trample under foot and plant them under obedience. This is the only way with your mind. If you put in practice these few words they will lead you to the perfection that God wants of you. (*Ibid.*, *lettre* cmli.)

To Mother Anne Catherine de Beaumont.

Your poor dear heart certainly makes me feel compassion for you, seeing you so surrounded with troubles. But the knowledge and the confidence I have that it

is all for the glory of God and your greater perfection comforts me. Once again I say, dearest Daughter, walk on amid your dissatisfaction, darkness and inward desolation, advancing thereby with firm step.

It is easy for us to see that God is holding you by the hand and leading you, though He does not permit you to see this yourself. Let your resolve not to offend Him and to please Him suffice. The possession of His holy peace in the depth of your soul is an assured mark of His presence and of His goodness. With such an assurance endure your troubles, overlooking them and speaking as little as possible about them, even to Our Lord Himself, for you should make every effort to divert your mind, coming back in simplicity to God in all things, leaving to Him all that concerns you, as I see you are doing so admirably. Persevere, I beg of you, and believe that to live by the cross, best found amid inward tribulations, is your greatest gain. Distrust of self is an excellent virtue so long as it is animated and sustained by holy generosity and trust in God, and such trust is, thank God, yours. You have more occasion to rejoice than to fear, and for this may God be blessed! In a word, our life must be one of spiritual valour, with arms always in our hands, until we attain to a perfect annihilation of all our passions and inclinations: it is the work of a life-time so we need not be dismayed. (Vol. iii, *lettre* cmliii.)

To Mother Marie Constance de Bressand.

. . . You must embrace this cross, and that generously. All that is said of you and of your House, having neither foundation nor truth, will pass. It will die out and your good reputation will survive. However, profit by this occasion, for perhaps you never again will

have the like opportunity of conforming to Our Lord. Welcome it all, cherish this contempt and scorn, hide it in your bosom and you will grow rich with so precious a treasure. Pay no heed either to the tongue or the hand that strikes but see only in it all, the most holy will of God which is rendering you by this tribulation conformable to Him. (*Ibid.*, *lettre* cmlxv.)

To Mother M.A. de Blonay.

My God, my true Daughter, but it is good for us to be seeing and finding out our own miseries and weaknesses ! It will submerge us in a holy contempt of ourselves and raise us to a more perfect and absolute trust in Him, who contains in Himself all our good. I love Him better there than in myself. . . . I am very glad the good Father does not flatter you. It would do me good to pass through such hands, but as God does not will it I do not. No, indeed, you had not that fault when you were here. What does he mean by doing violence ? That is not our spirit ; ours is to suffer the wrong rather than to kick against it. We should leave requital to God and should not move in the matter. I am very glad you have no attraction to bodily austerities, neither have I. It is not our spirit but let us make valiant use of those of the heart. Oh, but they are admirable ! (*Ibid.*, *lettre* cmlxvii).

To Sister Marie Félicienne Baudet.

. . . It is such a consolation to me to see your continual advancement . . . without doubt the divine Goodness calls you to very high perfection ; for this you only need a fixed determination to abandon yourself absolutely to His holy guidance in the person of your Superior, with a firm courage to do good and

avoid evil to the extent of your knowledge. Each day that you employ faithfully you acquire new strength and facility in the practice of virtue, so that all your difficulties will vanish and you will marvel in finding your dear soul in holy repose and familiarity with God, for *To him who fights valiantly it will be given to taste the hidden manna.* (Vol. iii, *lettre* mxxx.)

To Mother M.J. Favre.

. . . I see that the attraction of the Daughters of our Congregation in prayer is to this simple presence of God, in which one does nothing and is powerless to do anything ; those who try to do something and labour much spoil all. However, the opinion of religious persons is usually quite opposed to this and gives much anxiety to Sisters and sometimes to those who govern them . . . for, after all, I see that the simple looking unto God (regard en Dieu) by a total abandonment of the soul into His hands suffices for everything ; be it preparation for communion, thanksgiving, directing the intention and so forth : but to those who are not led by this way our path appears extravagant. (*Ibid.*, *lettre* mliii.)

To the same.

. . . I say plainly and shortly that these Daughters should be allowed to go by this way of simplicity, though it seems to me, for the consolation of those who walk therein that when they no longer have this attraction, this sweet attention to God which serves to sustain them, they should have something to fall back on, for when deprived of it the soul gets troubled and looks about for something on which to lean, and this ought not to be. (*Ibid.*, *lettre* mlxvi.)

To Mother Paule Jéronyme de Monthoux.

. . . All said and done there is no other way to peace than by a veritable flaying of our heart, which our good God wishes us to relinquish and to hand over to Him clear of all our interests and of all that is not Himself. Then He will reclothe us with that rich robe, no other than Himself, which He gives to His faithful servants and Spouses.

As to your prayer you make too many reflections and considerations. It is an exercise in which we must needs go straight to God with great simplicity, treating with Him confidently, be it in consideration on the sacred mystery if it can be done with facility, without effort ; or holding ourselves before Him or in Him, with much inward and outward reverence, speaking to Him, when one feels oneself so drawn, simply and confidingly about our little wants, such as they are. And at times that we are unable to do anything else, remaining in His presence, with the desire that He should accomplish His holy will in us and the resolution not to offend Him. All this is good prayer. (*Ibid.*, *lettre* mc.)

To Mother Louise Dorothée de Marigny.

. . . As to not usually making mental prayer, I do not think the prayer you make can do any harm because it is very sweet and tranquil. If, nevertheless, they do not wish it, you must acquiesce and make your life a continual prayer by the habit of keeping yourself always near God. In this way you will compensate abundantly for the want of regular prayer.[1] (Vol. iii, *lettre* mcxxiii.)

[1] Mother L.D. de Marigny was at this time in a delicate state of health.

To Mother M.A. de Blonay.

. . . My heart grieves for the state into which this poor soul has fallen and I long to hear that she is released from it. Oh, my Daughter, how solid is the foundation built on true humility and submission. Who builds thereon does not let himself be agitated by the winds of temptations nor, in my opinion, give way to them. There is self-esteem somewhere in the depths of this poor heart and it is kept alive by this ardent desire of austerities, to which I have always known that she was greatly attached. She has not submitted herself on this point with that entire simplicity and frankness that I would like to see ; but I hope God will convert all to the profit of her soul and that for the future she will be more humble.

Be careful to keep the best minds very low and show no esteem for them until they have attained profound humility of heart. Self-love is so subtle ! Where can you find that it does not penetrate ? The most experienced souls in the spiritual life and the most enlightened have trouble enough to guard themselves from its finesse and deceits.

Is it not the design of the Divine Goodness that we should be the most insignificant and the most humble Religious of His Church ? And what can serve better for that than contempt and disapproval ? O my Daughter, how dear it should be to us ! It is our spirit —that of a sweet and generous humility. (*Ibid.*, *lettre* mclv.)

To Mother Anne Marie Bollain.

. . . As to your scruples, my dear Daughter, if you take my advice you will not trouble about them,

but simply follow the customs and what is always practised in the Institute : otherwise, if one is to go by all one hears it would never come to an end, for there are as many different spirits as there are minds, hence an equal diversity of opinions. We must simply keep to what is of the Institute and by this means we cannot err.

Draw all the profit you can from this grace without troubling to analyse from whence it came, for that is not necessary. As to the rest, I see our good God wishes to try you by means of temptations, so you must have great courage and suffer generously whatever He will be pleased to send. I admit that those against faith are indeed the most trying that the soul can be called upon to suffer. Nevertheless, I believe you ought not to fear them nor let yourself dwell on them nor argue about them. Simply turn away therefrom, putting your heart and trust in God, hoping that He will assist you by His grace not to permit them to be the occasion of offending Him. (T. vii, vol. iv, *lettre* mclxxxvii.)

To Mother M.H. Guerin.

. . . I received your letter of October 26th yesterday. . . I learn from it your manner of prayer, which is very good and profitable. Though it may be deprived of the discourse of the understanding so as not to give enlightenment save in a very simple way, it is on this account, all the more admirable. Beware of letting your mind betake itself to other things whatever they may be ; let it remain in this sweet, tranquil and almost imperceptible occupation. Do not even want to see or to know with what your soul is occupied, but abide very simply in the unique attention to God. (*Ibid.*, *lettre* mccviii.)

To Mother Marie Françoise de Monçeau.[1]

You are quite right in making the Sisters from this country eat butter and I beg of you not to deprive yourself of this alleviation which you are giving them. See that you take my word in this for I am the old grandmother who has an altogether special love for you. . . .

The dispositions of your soul are those I desire, or rather, that Jesus desires for all true Daughters of the Visitation, that of complete abandonment to the care of divine Providence with no thought of self, and reposing there ; while doing with peace and gentleness whatever this same providence presents as the day goes by. God requires nothing else of us but this fidelity. (*Ibid., lettre* mcccvii.)

To Sister Marie Hélène Guerin.

. . . I do not remember to have told you not to think of feasts as they come round, for we ought to do so, and to receive with great humility the good sentiments that are begot of so holy a consideration. We ought however to conceal these good sentiments as much as we can, nor should we let ourselves be immersed in the delights of them, for nature is greedy and takes too big a share if she is not mortified. In a word, we must shun the admiration that is given to this kind of thing, keeping ourselves hidden under most holy humility and fidelity to the practice of true virtues and to the observance.

Our Blessed Father once wrote to me that God com-

[1] Superior of the Magdalen Penitents at Paris. The Saint gives it as her opinion that the Visitation should continue for some years to govern the Magdalen Penitents but not for perpetuity ; nor is it a matter to be dealt with in their Constitutions ; nor are Sisters other than the Superior to be given from the Visitation to these Houses.

municated to him many good sentiments but he did not know whether they were all of grace or of nature, yet he thanked God because he drew great profit from them. You must then try to imitate him in this and, as far as possible, let nothing be seen. You have a very affectionate and tender nature which contributes greatly to these languors. Strive your best to prevent them, diverting the body by some occupation and not giving the mind to useless things, thus keeping to God by a generous love. My Daughter, maintain your soul in peace, and in doing well fear nothing. (Vol. iv, *lettre* mccclxxxiv.)

To Mother Madeleine Elizabeth de Lucinge.

My dearest Daughter, may our most lovable Saviour be your eternal consolation. How do you come to have this weariness of spirit? For although you try to get the better of it, it is always regrettable, in that it deprives you of that expansion of heart which is so useful in the service of God. Shake it off if you can, take nothing to heart and let things run their course. Recommend all things to Our Lord and having gently done your best, think no more about it but abide in peace. (*Ibid.*, *lettre* mcccxciv.)

To Mother Marie Henriette de Prunelay.

. . . Since you find it helpful to manifest your conscience so openly to M. Moreau you must continue to do so, however, keep such holy liberty that you will not be in any way constrained thereby, neither as regards your person, nor your conduct, nor government, nor in things spiritual nor temporal. This is an important point in order to let the Holy Spirit of

God act in you, who wishes Himself to guide both you and your House. For this end, believe me, my dear Daughter, it is better to ask the advice you need more often from God than from man. God is the faithful friend who is pleased with the familiarity with which souls treat His goodness. I speak to you with entire confidence, in all sincerity, as I would do to my own soul, cherishing you in this quality, for in heart I am wholly yours. May God give us the grace to be His wholly. (*Ibid.*, *lettre* mcdi.)

To Mother Louise Dorothée Marigny.

. . . To conclude—your inward state is, thank God, as it should be. You must somewhat divert your mind from these attacks of faint-heartedness and melancholy, but I see they have not penetrated to the depths of your soul and that God makes you feel His suave presence with repose and confidence in His goodness ; That is worth more than to overflow with glowing ardour and pious sentiments. You have a good Master who knows you and is carefully leading you. You have only to follow His divine lights and attractions and to let yourself be moulded without resistance according to His good pleasure. (Vol. iv, *lettre* mcdv.)

To a Nun of the Visitation.

. . . Gently draw off your attention from every object but God. Who seeks only God, who desires God alone, finds Him in all things ; yea, even in what is most irksome and repugnant to our taste. As He hides Himself in such things shall we not then surely find Him in the suavity of our vocation and the sweetness of our exercises ? (*Ibid.*, *lettre* mcdxi.)

To Sister Anne Marguerite de la Luxière.

God has indeed, dearest Daughter, given me, I do think, an intimate knowledge of your soul, which I dearly cherish. You have only sweetly to put up with this trouble, maintaining repose by the complete abandonment of yourself into the hands of God, delivering yourself over for good to His mercy with unlimited trust. It is a great grace to possess such peace as yours amidst the battle you have to face within. Believe me, God loves you dearly, I dare assure you of this. Be then at rest about your salvation, trusting to the divine merits of Our Lord. (Vol. v, *lettre* mdlxxvii.)

To Mother Hélène Françoise Belin.

My very dear Daughter, what a consolation to see the change that God has wrought in you ! Such is the fruit of the holy patience and resignation you have practised, by the grace of God, amid terrible trouble and temptations. Divine Providence made use of these tests to prove you and to purify your soul as gold in the furnace. May His infinite goodness be eternally blessed ! There is a great feeling of serenity in finding oneself in an atmosphere of calm after so severe a storm—that is, if the spirit be always in the disposition to receive indifferently bitter or sweet, seeing in both the most holy will of God ; for He gives with equal love the one and the other, and more often He attaches to the former a peculiar grace and profit for the soul.

Your manner of prayer is altogether good, holy and solid ; all you need is to keep your mind sweetly and tranquilly fixed in a simple attention to God. Judging by your account of your dispositions, sentiments

and practices, all appears exactly as it should be. Nothing more is required save to persevere faithfully in the desire of humility, and that love of your own abjection which is the cream of humility and its most solid practice.

Humility is a great treasure and a grace that draws all other graces, and even God Himself, into the soul for He takes His pastime with the lowly.

Dwell therein, my Daughter, and be indefatigable in the practice of this holy virtue without any foolish scrutiny as to whether there may not be some insidious vanity therein. No, if it appears to you that there is anything of the kind, turn away from such subtleties and examinations of self-love. Take no action. Do not even appear to perceive them and leave in the hands of our adorable Saviour the care of purifying you of all other little imperfections with which our nature is weighed down. Have but one care : to be attentive to God as your attraction leads you, doing good in the way that His Providence directs from moment to moment, and unburdening yourself of all other solicitudes. Holy simplicity being singularly accordant with the path in which you are led, you will have difficulty in making reflections and must absolutely give up the attempt. You are right to be reserved in communicating your interior state ; few persons would understand so simple a path. (Vol. v, *lettre* mdcliii.)

To Mother Anne Louise de Marin de St. Michel.

. . . Oh God, dear Daughter, what a fervent *Adveniat regnum tuum* you must have said ! For now Jesus, our divine Master, has indeed taken complete possession of your soul and reigns there quite tranquilly. Oh, the power of grace ! It is beyond human

ken—the language of angels can alone express it. . . if souls knew how to surrender themselves wholly to God the favours they would receive would be quite other than those they now experience. That which our infirmity cannot do is wrought by the sweet goodness of His omnipotent grace. Ask Him in your mute language to establish His reign and His union within us while I pray Him to continue His grace to you. My dearest Daughter, write to me fully about God's guidance over you, and add, if it is in your power, something of this progressive state which mounts from purity to purity, always more simply and intimately in holy unity. Alas! I am in no way capable of these sublime ways of God, but ask Him to make me very humble. (*Ibid.*, *lettre* mdclxxvii.)

To Mother Marie Aimée de Rabutin.[1]

My dearest Daughter, I know you better than you know yourself; that is why I tell you to abide in peace without torturing your mind to find out how far you have been faithful to grace. Make your examination of conscience with attention and do not spend more time over it than the Directory gives you. Afterwards accuse yourself simply of the faults you have remarked without delaying to make returns on self. If your miseries are great, humble yourself, but do not torment yourself. I see to the very bottom of your heart. You have shown me with such

When Mother de Rabutin was elected Superior at Thonon, St. Jane Frances said to the outsister who came to fetch her: "Make the most of the time your new Superior rules you, for you have never had, and perhaps never will have her equal." And in later years the Saint again spoke of her in these words: "When once Mother Marie Aimée returns to Annecy she must not be taken away again, for although she is my relative I cannot help saying that she has always been a living rule and a model of perfect observance."—Archives of the Visitation, Annecy.

sincerity all its twistings and turnings that you ought to rely on what I tell you and thank God for the graces He has given you. Ask Him always to hold you under His fatherly protection. (Vol. v, *lettre* mdclxxix.)

To the same.

. . . Referring to the memorandum on your Retreat I have already told you not to make efforts to regain this state of attention to God. It is not in your power. Remain effortless without striving to incite yourself to whatever it may be. . . As to these acts of submission, when the soul has liberty to make them with absolute simplicity she can of course do so ; but you were not able to do this so you should not have forced yourself. Once this attention to God [simple regard] has been freely given to the soul it includes everything else, and in a degree of unity which surpasses all else.

Although when words are enkindled by the divine attraction the soul can make use of them, yet this is not for you, as in your case it would only be to seek human satisfaction. We must receive everything God gives us ; good thoughts, lights, movements, words and such like, that pass through our heart if they are the outcome of this attraction, this simple attention to God : nor must we turn aside from it to pursue, to satisfy, to entertain any other thought, for that would be to quit the principal for the accessory. These things abide with us or pass from us at the good pleasure of Him who grants them. We must follow God's attractions and promptings in the soul.

Dwell wholly in Him. May He be blessed. May He bless and possess my Daughter. (*Ibid.*, mdccxxxi.)

To the same.

. . . God grant Sister J. Baptiste may correspond to the grace she has received : it is a very great one. But if she is not faithful in mortifying herself it is to be feared that when the feeling of it will have passed she will slacken her pace. And poor Sister Seraphine —if the Father confessor could make each appreciate the importance of acting up to the grace she has received and inspire her with the fear of losing it, for perhaps it may never return, it would, I bethink me, be very desirable.

I confess I was touched on hearing the grace given to Sister M. Seraphine ; truly, it was a marvellous favour. A thousand times would I see her die rather than fall from it ; but I hope she never will, for He who has begun the good work will by His powerful hand sustain and perfect it. All praise and thanksgiving to Him and His holy Mother. This Daughter is indeed in my heart. (Vol. v, *lettre* mdccxxxvii.)

To the same.

My dear Daughter, I see your soul continues always to live in the vicissitudes of consolation and enlightenment, desolation, obscurity and dryness. Such is the way of all virtuous souls. But with you there is always a certain anxiety when reduced to powerlessness, lest it be the result of some fault, and you fear you may have offended God by your cowardice and infidelities. Alas, where should we be if darkness and incapacity made us guilty before God. Far from that, they come from His divine Goodness in order to purify us, and to give us an opportunity of meriting by suffering with humble and patient endurance ; for who does not know that fervour, light, spiritual

activity, are not in our power, and that the sole act of our will alone is? Why then torment ourselves when we cannot do this or that? For all that, I see that Our Lord is never very far from you, for in your dryness He always gives you the wherewithal to pass through it. Let that suffice for you and be not so introspective; you take too much notice of what passes within you. Receive good and bad, consolation or desolation indifferently, keeping your mind simply attentive to God. Try so to keep off your attention from your inward dispositions that you would not be able to tell what they are. Act as far as is possible in this way, and keep far from you this fear of sinning which is so deep in your heart. When you see sin, avoid it carefully, otherwise, do not think about it. I see very well you cannot do as you like with your thoughts; this is another trouble which you must just bear without dwelling on it. Strive, however, gently to calm your mind and to retrench all voluntary reflections. Ask God that I may truly do what I am asking you to do. (*Ibid.*, *lettre* mdccxli.)

To Sister Anne Françoise de Pra.

. . . I tell you again what I told you at my departure from Nessy: the more you speak of your troubles the more they will take hold of your imagination, and this will but increase your worry. When a soul makes her inward difficulties once clearly understood it ought to suffice, and the remedies given should be applied. When God pleases He will cure them, but it will not be by talking of them, and nothing, in my opinion, will relieve you more than putting into practice what I have now told you. [This advice is humble submission to God and faithful practice of the Rule. As the Saint has given it in previous

letters we do not repeat it.] (Vol. v, *lettre* mdcccxxxv.)

To a Superior of the Visitation.

My most good and dear Daughter, you have depicted your inward state and your struggles so naively, that it seems to me as if your soul were in my very hand. *None will be crowned who has not fought valiantly and he who shall fight shall inherit the glory.*[1] O my Daughter, on these words of Eternal Truth, we must at every moment lift up our minds above ourselves and take new courage to persevere in this warfare, for it is truly of God. Let us never flag nor grow weary of our efforts till the divine Saviour gives us His peace, and this may not be until the hour of death. But what does it matter provided He be with us, and He certainly will be, because His goodness assures us that He is with those in tribulation. Walk then henceforth in this holy company. (*Ibid.*, *lettre* mdccclxxxiii.)

To a Superior.

. . . Certainly you are under great obligations to the infinite goodness [of God] who bestows upon you so abundantly His graces and lights. I rejoice at your happiness and your fidelity to this grace, for I look upon the abiding sense of your nothingness, the longing for purity of heart and the continual annihilation of yourself in this divine Ocean, I look upon it, I say, as an invaluable grace. Never give up the practice of suppressing the activity of your mind, but do it, as it were, insensibly. And believe me, you should overcome this great aversion you have against bodily

[1] " For he also that striveth for the mastery is not crowned except he strive lawfully." 2. Tim, 11-5.—" Quit yourselves like men; Take courage to fight."—1 Kings iv, 9.

relief, for though it may be under the fair pretext of mortification, self-love and your own will may dominate it. We must beware of the enemy vanity, and prize obedience, which mortifies such imperfections, more than the austerity of the body: inasmuch as that of the mind is incomparably better. (*Ibid.*, *lettre* mdcccxc.)

To a Superior of the Visitation.

. . . If wellnigh annihilated through abjection what does it matter provided God be served ? Never can we do Him better service than by this way of humility. Embrace it then with your whole heart, without caring whether or no you satisfy the world, or what it may say. We have but to please God, Him only to honour and glorify. (*Ibid.*, *lettre* mdcccxcviii.)

To a Superior of the Visitation.

I am now like one of those foster-mothers who, when they are a little time away from their chubby babes, have milk in such abundance that they are longing to be relieved of it. Indeed it is truly a great business to be a Mother. So you are, I see, by your letter, being weaned by God from all external things, and no longer have taste or relish for them, because He wants to make you see and relish those that are inward, and Himself alone—purely alone. May He be blessed ! Abide in Him without seeking for aught else. No, my dearest Sister, you ought not to apply your mind elsewhere, for, as you tell me, you can only do so with difficulty. To remain in lowliness and despoliation before His divine Majesty is all you have to do, attending nevertheless carefully and sweetly to your employment. . . I love dearly souls who go their way in

simplicity, for I have a great aversion to reflections. Still, we must gently bear with those who suffer much from them. (Vol. v, *lettre* mcmiv.)

To a Superior of the Visitation.

. . . I bethink me that I understand well enough your inward dispositions and the manner in which you receive all these graces, though they be vouchsafed you in the midst of great obscurity, for God alone is the light and the intelligence of such a supernatural state. It belongs to this sovereign Master to do what He pleases in the souls who, without reserve, hand themselves over to His power, and it is beyond the ken of the human mind. I have already told you that your interior way is a condition which can be seen, tasted, felt, but not expressed. In this life our sight is too dim and our intelligence too gross. The profit your dear soul receives amidst these obscurities is infinitely greater through unity of spirit, and perfection is practised in a far more excellent manner than if your heart were overflowing with loving sentiments and in positive acts of virtue, which, too, you have an opportunity of practising by the rash judgments formed of you. Few souls render themselves capable of this divine way, this dwelling in union with God and complaining not of the wrongs done them. It will all turn to the glory of God and to your spiritual profit. (*Ibid.*, *lettre* mcmv.)

To a Sister of the Visitation.

My dearest Daughter, I think it was necessary for you to get a knowledge of your faults through your own experience, and thus to learn how great and profound is the abyss of human misery. But to have

fallen once is enough, and ought to serve to make us distrust our foolishness and weakness, and maintain us in dependence on grace for the rest of our lives, recognising that in it alone all our good depends. Then, in this way, we shall in the very depth of our heart build a solid foundation of genuine humility and out and out trust in God. . . . Suffer humbly and patiently the rebellion of your lower nature. Look away from self and simply unto God. Be faithful in making acts of exterior virtues as God presents them to you and often say to Him, though it be without any feeling of what you are saying, words of self-surrender, of filial and loving confidence. After such words spiritual light will return, and even if it should not, that of faith is sufficient for us. The divine Goodness does not leave off in us that which He has begun. (*Ibid.*, *lettre* mcmxxv.)

To a Sister of the Visitation.

My very dear Little One. . . Of all your aspirations that of most holy humility should take the first place. I beg of you, my Daughter, see that this is so. . . . Your prayer is in keeping with your naturally strong passions, for, as you know, on whatever side they are moved they carry you away with great violence; therefore in prayer as in everything else you must strive your utmost to calm and restrain your feelings, retaining only the remembrance and the knowledge of the practical lights you received in it, and put such into execution. This is the true fruit you should gather from prayer and from all else. You must altogether eschew these little coldnesses and melancholy moods, for the spirit of God is sweet and joyful. Manifest your whole soul with complete confidence to your good and dear Mother, and do faithfully what-

ever she tells you. She will lead you well and safely. Believe me, your happiness depends on this submission and guidance. (*Ibid.*, *lettre* mcmxxvi.)

To a Sister of the Visitation.

. . . He [Our Lord] permits sometimes that we should be accused of things of which we are not guilty to test our love for Him and our desire to imitate Him in some way. We ought to be very glad that our failings are seen; and if you have not committed the fault of which you are admonished, humble yourself profoundly and believe in your heart that you have indeed committed greater ones, which are hidden from the eyes of creatures, nay, even from your own, and therefore you never could be accused wrongfully. (*Ibid.*, *lettre* mcmxlvii.)

To a Sister who wished to become a lay sister.

My most dear Daughter, it would be impossible for me to flatter you or to gild the pill for you. You, whose dear soul confides in me so, fully and freely and to whom I believe Our dear Lord has given a spirit that He wishes should hold itself independent of all things, above itself, its passions, its inclinations, however good they may appear; such is the greatest and the most agreeable sacrifice that we can offer Him.

As to this old desire of yours to become a lay sister; believe me, the practice of our Blessed Father to *ask for nothing and to refuse nothing* is higher than all that, and than all other practices of humility. . . The real abode of humility is in the centre of the mind; and if we have a thorough knowledge of our lowliness, vileness and abjection, and like to be considered and treated in keeping with this knowledge, we may then

be of good hope that we have genuine humility. Think no more, at least not deliberately, of these exterior humiliations nor of the change of employment they would of necessity entail, since God has destined you for other service. Nothing can ever equal the dignity and greatness of God and of His holy Mother and nothing will ever equal their humility. Relinquish all such wishes, give them into the hands of God and live in peace. (Vol. v, *lettre* mcmxlix.)

To a Sister of the Visitation.

My Daughter, perfect submission of judgment and of will is the coin with which Our Lord wishes us to purchase the precious treasure of holy peace of heart. (*Ibid.*, *lettre* mcmlvi.)

To another.

My dearest Daughter, give yourself to God, heart, body and mind, inalienably, without excepting anything whatever within you and around you. Leave all to the disposition of divine providence in which you should tranquilly and trustfully repose, as a child on the bosom of its sweet mother. Receive from the hand of God all that happens to you by holy acquiescence in His good pleasure, without beguiling the time by philosophising and reflecting upon self. In like manner love supremely this divine will, since it is the rule of all perfection and the source of all our happiness. Love in a special manner the practice of this injunction which we ought to hold in such great reverence: *Ask for nothing and refuse nothing* pertaining to the religious life. I except all that is ordained by the Constitutions. Be humble of heart with a humility that does not cramp the spirit but

dilates it with holy joy, that is sincere and generous. Let your desire to please God be stronger than the fear of displeasing Him. Be very gracious and gentle in your conversation. Delight in a cordial union of heart with the Sisters; let your charity be universal. Keep your Rule and love it. Maintain a holy zeal for the preservation of the Institute, not only in your own heart but in that of all others. Meditate upon these words of Our Lord: *Learn of Me because I am meek and humble of heart and you shall find rest to your souls.*[1] Impress them on others as much as you can, they are the marrow and the spirit of our vocation.

You ought to cherish the opportunity that has been given you of so deserving and so complete a denuding of self. I hope it may procure for you a very powerful grace from our good God who supremely loves a perfect despoliation of all that is not He. Live then, my Daughter, in this blessed state, never be reclothed with any thing other than the pure and holy love of the accomplishment of the will of our divine Spouse, who, as I hope, will give us the consolation of now only saying au revoir, not however to reclothe ourselves when we meet. (Qui comme j'espère, nous donnera la consolation de nous revoir, sans toutefois nous revêtir.) (*Ibid.*, *lettre* mcmlx.)

Letter of St. Francis de Sales to St. Chantal. (*In the old edition referred to* (*page* 249,) *by St. Jane, as letter* 65*th.*)

Chambéry, March 28th.

Now, my most dear Daughter, it is full time that I should, if I possibly can, answer your long letter. Yet must I do it in haste for I have very little leisure and were it not that I have already got the gist of the

[1] Matt. xi. 29.

sermon I am about to preach in my head I should be unable to write more than the little note attached to this.

Well, to speak of the inward trial about which you write to me; it is really nothing but a certain insensibility that deprives you of the enjoyment of not only consolations and inspirations, but of faith, hope and charity; yet all the while you have these virtues and in an exceedingly good condition but you lack the enjoyment of them. You are like a child whose guardian takes over the administration of all his possessions, in such wise, that although they really belong to the child, he, not having the handling of them, seemingly possesses nothing save what is required for his upbringing, and as St. Paul says, in this *he differeth nothing from a servant though he be lord of all.* (Gal. iv, 1.)

So it is with you, my dear Daughter. God wishes you to have the management of your faith, hope and charity only in so far as barely to sustain your spiritual life, and so that on occasions of pure necessity you may be able to draw on them. Ah, how happy we are to be thus held in check—a strict hand kept over us by our heavenly Guardian. We are already doing just what is best; that is, adoring the loving providence of God and then throwing ourselves into His arms and upon His bosom. No, Lord, I no longer desire the enjoyment of my faith, hope, charity, save to enable me in truth to say, though I say it without pleasure or relish, that I would rather die than relinquish my faith, my hope, my charity. Ah, Lord, if it is Thy good pleasure that I should have no pleasure in the exercise of these virtues which Thy grace has bestowed upon me, I will it with my whole heart, although against the inclinations of my will.

It is the supreme point of holy resignation to be

content with arid, dry, insensible acts, exercised by the higher will alone, as it would be the supreme degree of abstinence to content oneself in eating, not simply without taste or relish, but with disgust and repulsion.

You have expressed your sufferings very clearly ; continue as you are doing, that is the best remedy for them, protesting to Our Lord even in spoken words, nay, even sometimes telling Him in song that you wish to live as one dead and to eat with no more appetite, taste, or perception than if you were dead.

In a word, the Saviour wishes us to be so absolutely His that nothing of self remains, that we abandon ourselves wholly, without reservation, to the mercy of His providence. Let us then abide, my dearest Daughter, within this darkness of the Passion. Rightly do I say " within this darkness," for just reflect on Our Lady and St. John at the foot of the Cross enveloped in the wonderful and terrible darkness that prevailed. They no longer heard Our Lord, no longer saw Him, no longer were possessed of any feelings save those of bitterness and anguish ; for, although they had faith, it also was in darkness, because it behoveth them to participate in the dereliction of the Saviour.

How happy are we to be slaves to this great God, who made Himself a slave for us !

But it is time for the sermon. Adieu, my dear Mother, my Daughter in this Saviour. May His divine goodness live for ever. I have an incomparable ardour for the advancement of our heart and for the sake of it I relinquish all other satisfactions into the hands of His sovereign and fatherly providence.

Goodnight again, my dear Daughter. May Jesus,

gentle Jesus, sole heart of our heart, bless us with His holy love. Amen.

March 28th, 1612.

FRANCIS Bishop of Geneva.

Tome *Quinzième*. Vol. V. *Lettres*, pp. 197-9.

DEUS LAUDETUR.